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GOLD STANDARD
coffee cake
page 62

THE cake ISSUE

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from the editor

Calling All Cake Lovers

Yes, you can absolutely have your cake and eat it, too—in this issue, at least! From stir-together stunners to an artfully decorated wedding cake and the many variations of buttercreams, we dive deep into the sweet world of cake-baking.

When it comes to cake, it's about more than the recipes and the time spent in the kitchen baking. It's about the memories. When I was a kid, my mom and I would make Pillsbury's white cake mix (and lick the bowl!) for family birthday celebrations, and occasionally, we'd bake just the layers so we could devour them warm from the oven, just the two of us. For my aunt Cheryl's birthday, we'd tint frosting the brightest shade of purple you've ever seen because it's her signature color. As a teenager working at Edgar's Bakery in Birmingham, Alabama, I ate more than my body weight in the delicious strawberry-studded buttercream that adorns its signature strawberry cake. Smearing buttercream on each other's faces is a tradition my aunt Janice and I share each time we celebrate a birthday together. And seeing my new monogram piped on the side of my three-tier wedding cake and sharing bites with my husband, Stephen, in front of our family and friends is a moment I'll always cherish. These are just a few of my favorite cake memories, and I'd love to hear about yours.

In the pages that follow, you'll see the beautiful wedding cake we had the pleasure of dreaming up and creating for one of our baking retreat friends, Kelsey Phinney, and her husband, Patrick. I shared an instant bond with Kelsey and her mother, Tammy, as we traveled to baking retreats over the years. As wedding chatter started, I jumped in with a quickness to make sure her wedding cake was extra special. Laura Crandall and Katie Moon Dickerson, both amazing bakers and team members here at *Bake from Scratch*, took Kelsey's dreams and created a stunning cake that I know you'll love. But don't worry—we're sharing the recipe with you and variations for size so you can make it yourself for any and all occasions.

If you've ever seen the vivid and intricate creations of Robert Lucas of The Sweet Impact, you've probably asked yourself how cake and art can intersect in such a beautiful way. Well, learn more about this very talented artist on page 27 for the full scoop. We also know that the "art" of baking comes with science and technique that goes beyond trial and error, and on page 63, you'll read all about Nicola Lamb and her new book, *SIFT*, which gets to the "why" and "how" of baking—information and answers that we all need in our kitchens.

All this talk of cake has me headed into the kitchen to bake the Coconut Tres Leches Cake from page 89, a recipe that reminds me of the coconut poke cake that my aunt Cheryl makes for my birthday each year.

Preheat your oven; it's time to bake!

Brian

Brian Hart Hoffman
Editor-in-Chief

Baking Retreats: In the Know So You're Ready to Go

As part of the 10th anniversary year of *Bake from Scratch*, in 2025, we're hosting our largest number of baking retreats to date, with adventures to new destinations and returning visits to favorite locales. But one of the questions I'm most often asked is, "How come every time I go to register for a retreat, it's already sold out?" Registration for retreats is made available first to alumni of previous baking retreats, so it's likely that a particular retreat will be sold out by the time it's announced to the public. Any baking retreat you attend gives you access to the presale for future retreats—so if you have your eye on a particularly popular retreat destination, you should consider attending another retreat (perhaps one in our test kitchen in Birmingham, Alabama) to become an alumnus to get first dibs the next time your top pick comes around. Be sure you're signed up for our weekly newsletter, PreHeat, at *bakefromscratch.com* to stay current on all retreat news and updates, and you can always email events@bakefromscratch.com with any questions.

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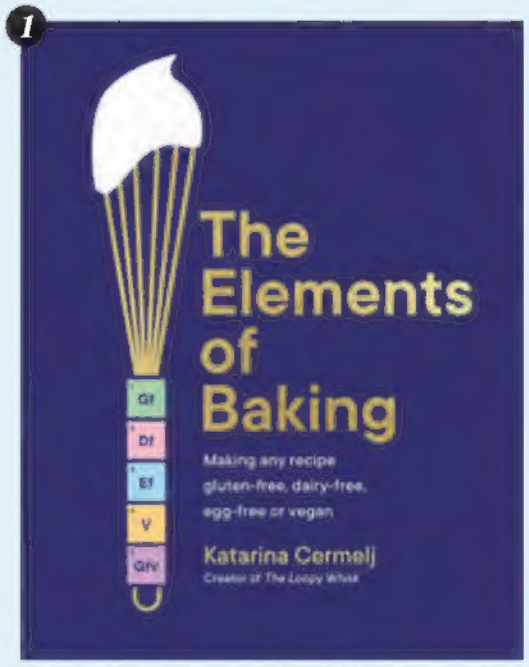

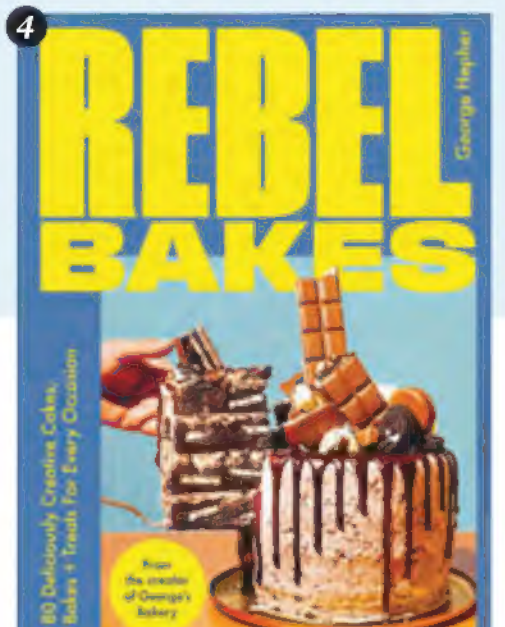

1 *The Elements of Baking: Making Any Recipe Gluten-Free, Dairy-Free, Egg-Free or Vegan*

BY KATARINA CERMELJ

New from Katarina Cermelj of *The Loopy Whisk* blog, this tome will be your textbook for baking with dietary restrictions. The book is filled with comprehensive and easy-to-read visual guides for adapting recipes to allow for your needs and preferences, and side-by-side photos showing how gluten-free, vegan, and other allergy-friendly adaptations affect your baked goods. With mouthwatering photos for each of its 140 recipes, such as Apple Crumble Cake, Double Chocolate Crinkle Cookies, and Cheesy Garlic Pull-Apart Bread, this book will be an invaluable tool in your baking arsenal.

➔ ***theloopywhisk.com***

2 *Bake from Scratch: Volume Nine*

BY BRIAN HART HOFFMAN

We're thrilled to present our latest annual volume of recipes. Inside, you'll find every recipe from our 2024 magazine issues, as well as a baker's dozen of exclusive, never-before-published recipes. Along with the thoroughly tested recipes and beautiful photography, the book is rich with helpful tips and make-ahead suggestions. Whether you want to perfect your piecrust, try a new bread, or celebrate with seasonal treats, this compendium provides for any skill level and any occasion.

➔ ***bakefromscratch.com/shop***

3 *Sweet Tooth: 100 Desserts to Save Room for*

BY SARAH FENNEL

Sarah Fennel, author of the influential blog *Broma Bakery*, debuts her first cookbook, filled with desserts that will leave you with a craving too strong to ignore. Each recipe features clear instructions and tips to help home bakers achieve bakery-quality results and encourage them to bake more. With nostalgic and delicious classics such as Oatmeal Cream Cookies and creative confections like Espresso Martini Cake, you won't be able to resist her inventive creations.

➔ ***bromabakery.com/cookbook***

4 *Rebel Bakes: 80+ Deliciously Creative Cakes, Bakes and Treats for Every Occasion*

BY GEORGE HEPHER

This debut cookbook from George Hepher, founder of the popular UK mail-order bakery George's Bakery, is filled with 80 unique takes on everyday treats that will leaving you craving more. With classics like Lemon Meringue Pie, candy-filled fudge-like Rocky Road Mania, and elegant Strawberry + Champagne Roll, this book is a must-have for anyone looking to add a big batch of whimsy and fun to their baking.

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Whoopie Pie Bundt Cake,
PAGE 13

sweet NOSTALGIA

These cakes are inspired by the treats that fill our childhood memories

Banana Pudding Bundt Cake,
PAGE 15

PHOTOGRAPHY BY KYLE CARPENTER AND STEPHANIE WELBOURNE STEELE
STYLING BY MAGGIE RATLIFF

WHOOPIE PIE BUNDT CAKE

Makes 1 (10-cup) Bundt cake

Whoopie pies are believed to have originated with the Pennsylvania Amish community in the early 1900s. Though other regions of New England, particularly Massachusetts and Maine, claim the whoopie pie as their own, the cream-filled cake-like cookies have since become a favorite across the nation. Our bake is a supersized version of the single-serving original that's party-ready and guaranteed to put a smile on your face.

- 2 cups (250 grams) all-purpose flour
- 2 cups (440 grams) firmly packed light brown sugar
- 1½ teaspoons (7.5 grams) baking soda
- ¾ teaspoon (2.25 grams) kosher salt
- ⅔ cup (50 grams) Dutch process cocoa powder
- 1 cup (240 grams) hot brewed coffee or hot water (165°F/74°C to 170°F/77°C)
- ⅔ cup (160 grams) sour cream
- ½ cup (112 grams) vegetable oil
- 2 teaspoons (8 grams) vanilla extract
- 2 large eggs (100 grams)
- Marshmallow Filling (recipe follows)
- Chocolate Glaze (recipe follows)

1. Preheat oven to 325°F (170°C).
2. In a large bowl, whisk together flour, brown sugar, baking soda, and salt.
3. In a medium bowl, place cocoa; whisk in hot coffee or hot water until smooth and well combined. Whisk in sour cream, oil, and vanilla until well combined. Whisk in eggs until well combined. Whisk cocoa mixture into flour mixture until no dry streaks remain.
4. Spray a 10-cup Bundt pan with baking spray with flour; using a pastry brush, spread baking spray into nooks of pan. Pour batter into prepared pan.
5. Bake until a wooden pick inserted near center comes out with a few moist crumbs, 55 minutes to 1 hour. Let cool in pan for 10 minutes. Invert cake onto a wire rack, and let cool completely.
6. Using a large serrated knife, cut cooled cake in half horizontally. Using a cake lifter or cake board, remove top half of cake, and reserve. Place bottom half on a serving platter.
7. Place Marshmallow Filling in a pastry bag fitted with a ½-inch round piping tip (Ateco #807). Pipe onto bottom half of cake as desired. Place top half of cake on filling. Spoon Chocolate Glaze onto cake. Best served same day as made. Cover and refrigerate for up to 2 days.

Marshmallow Filling

Makes about 2½ cups

- 1 large egg white (30 grams), room temperature
- 6 tablespoons (126 grams) light corn syrup
- 3 tablespoons (36 grams) granulated sugar
- ¼ teaspoon kosher salt
- ¼ teaspoon cream of tartar
- ¾ teaspoon (3 grams) vanilla extract

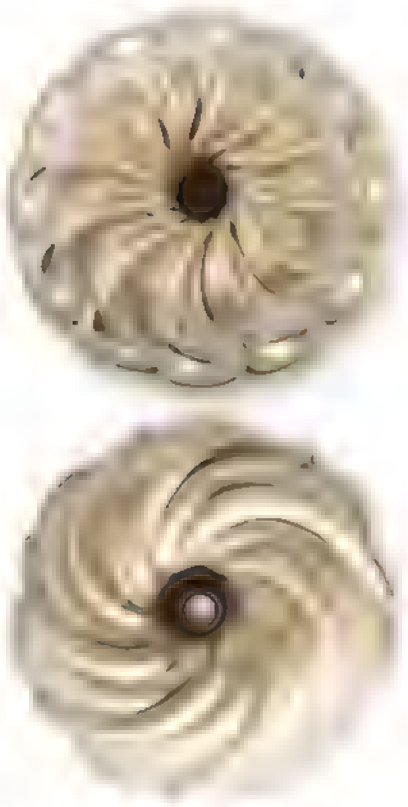
1. In the top of a double boiler, whisk together egg white, corn syrup, sugar, salt, and cream of tartar. Cook over simmering water, whisking constantly, until sugar dissolves and an instant-read thermometer registers 160°F (71°C), about 7 minutes.
2. Remove bowl from heat, and place on a kitchen towel-lined counter. Beat with a hand mixer fitted with the whisk attachment at high speed until cool to the touch, doubled in volume, and stiff peaks form, 6 to 8 minutes. Beat in vanilla. Use immediately.

Chocolate Glaze

Makes about 1 cup

- ½ cup (120 grams) heavy whipping cream
- 1 tablespoon (21 grams) light corn syrup
- 6 ounces (170 grams) bittersweet chocolate, finely chopped

1. In a small saucepan, heat cream and corn syrup over medium heat, stirring frequently, until steaming. (Do not boil.)
2. In a small bowl, combine cream mixture and chocolate; let stand for 5 minutes. Starting in center of bowl, slowly stir mixture with a rubber spatula until well combined. Use immediately.



Get the Pirouette and Swirl Bundt Pans we used for these recipes at **bakefromscratch.com/shop.**

For step-by-step photos of halving, filling, and assembling these cakes, visit **bakefromscratch.com/cake-of-the month.**

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BANANA PUDDING BUNDT CAKE

Makes 1 (10-cup) Bundt cake

This cake is a twist on the classic dessert every Southerner knows so well. Each component of banana pudding is included in this cake—from vanilla wafer crumbs in the batter to a double dose of fresh banana in the filling and sweet whipped cream on top. It's so good, you might not go back to the original.

- **1 cup (227 grams) unsalted butter, softened**
- **1 cup (200 grams) granulated sugar**
- **½ cup (110 grams) firmly packed light brown sugar**
- **3 large eggs (150 grams), room temperature**
- **1 tablespoon (18 grams) vanilla bean paste**
- **2½ cups (313 grams) all-purpose flour**
- **1½ cups (159 grams) finely ground vanilla wafers**
- **1½ teaspoons (4.5 grams) kosher salt**
- **1 teaspoon (5 grams) baking powder**
- **1½ cups (360 grams) whole buttermilk, room temperature**
- **Banana Crème Mousseline (recipe follows)**
- **2 large ripe bananas (308 grams), sliced crosswise ¼ inch thick**
- **Vanilla Whipped Cream (recipe follows)**
- **Garnish: banana slices, vanilla wafers**

1. Preheat oven to 325°F (170°C).
2. In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, beat butter and sugars at medium speed until light and fluffy, 3 to 4 minutes, stopping to scrape bottom and sides of bowl. Add eggs, one at a time, beating well after each addition. Beat in vanilla bean paste.
3. In a large bowl, whisk together flour, ground wafers, salt, and baking powder. With mixer on low speed, add flour mixture to butter mixture in three additions alternately with buttermilk, beginning and ending with flour mixture, beating until just combined after each addition.
4. Spray a 10-cup Bundt pan with baking spray with flour. Spoon batter into prepared pan, smoothing with an offset spatula. Firmly tap pan on a kitchen towel-lined counter several times to settle batter.
5. Bake until a wooden pick inserted near center comes out clean, 1 hour and 10 minutes to 1 hour and 25 minutes, covering with foil halfway through baking to prevent excess browning. Let cool in pan for 10 minutes. Invert cake onto a wire rack, and let cool completely.
6. Using a serrated knife, cut cooled cake in half horizontally. Using a cake lifter or cake board, remove top half of cake, and reserve. Using a small spoon, scoop out center from bottom half of cake, creating a 1½-inch-wide, 1-inch-deep trench. (Reserve cake crumbs for garnish, if desired; see Note.)
7. Spoon Banana Crème Mousseline into a pastry bag fitted with a large star piping tip (Ateco #826). Pipe into cake trench and on bottom half of cake as desired. Top with banana slices. Place top half of cake onto filling and banana.
8. Spoon Vanilla Whipped Cream into a pastry bag fitted with a large star piping tip (Ateco #826). Pipe onto top half of cake as desired. Garnish with cake crumbs, banana slices, and vanilla wafers, if desired. Cover and refrigerate for up to 3 days.

Note: *To toast cake crumbs for garnish, bake them on a parchment paper-lined baking sheet at 325°F (170°C) for 10 to 15 minutes.*

Banana Crème Mousseline

Makes 4 cups

- **2 cups (308 grams) chopped ripe bananas**
- **2½ cups (600 grams) whole milk**
- **¾ cup (150 grams) granulated sugar**
- **7 tablespoons (56 grams) cornstarch**
- **¾ teaspoon (2.25 grams) kosher salt**
- **4 large egg yolks (74 grams)**
- **½ cup (113 grams) plus 2 tablespoons (28 grams) unsalted butter, cubed and divided**
- **2 teaspoons (12 grams) vanilla bean paste**

1. In a medium bowl, combine bananas and milk; cover and refrigerate for at least 8 hours or up to overnight.
2. Strain milk into a medium saucepan, discarding solids. Heat milk over medium heat until steaming. (Do not boil.)
3. In another medium bowl, whisk together sugar, cornstarch, and salt; whisk in egg yolks until smooth. Gradually whisk in half of hot milk. Whisk egg mixture into remaining hot milk in pan. Bring to a boil over medium heat, whisking frequently. Cook, whisking constantly, until thickened and an instant-read thermometer registers 185°F (85°C), about 3 minutes. Remove from heat.
4. Whisk in 2 tablespoons (28 grams) butter in two additions until melted and smooth; whisk in vanilla bean paste.
5. Strain mixture through a fine-mesh sieve into a large bowl, discarding solids. Cover with plastic wrap, pressing wrap directly onto surface of pastry cream to prevent a skin from forming. Refrigerate until thick and cold, at least 4 hours, or overnight.
6. Let pastry cream and remaining ½ cup (113 grams) butter stand at room temperature for 20 to 30 minutes. (Butter should be slightly soft and the same temperature as pastry cream.)
7. In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, beat softened butter at medium speed until smooth, about 1 minute. Gradually add pastry cream, beating until combined after each addition and stopping to scrape bottom and sides of bowl. Refrigerate until thick but pipable, about 1 hour, stirring every 30 minutes. Use immediately.

Vanilla Whipped Cream

Makes 1½ cups

- **½ cup (120 grams) cold heavy whipping cream**
- **¼ cup (30 grams) confectioners' sugar**
- **½ teaspoon (2 grams) vanilla extract**

1. In the bowl of stand mixer fitted with the whisk attachment, beat all ingredients at medium speed until well combined. Increase mixer speed to high, and beat just until stiff peaks form. Use immediately.

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BLACK VELVET CAKE

Makes 1 (8-inch) cake

The first iteration of this luscious layer cake was featured in our March/April 2017 issue. We removed its caramel filling, swapped unsweetened cocoa powder in the layers to black cocoa powder, and replaced the cream cheese frosting in favor of a double-chocolate no-cook buttercream to deliver an intense chocolate experience. Plus, this cake requires no heavy lifting of equipment—simply stir it together! Whether celebrating a birthday, an anniversary, or simply craving the ultimate indulgence, this cake delivers satisfaction with every bite.

- 3 cups (375 grams) all-purpose flour
- 3 cups (660 grams) firmly packed light brown sugar
- 2 teaspoons (10 grams) baking powder
- 1¼ teaspoons (3.75 grams) kosher salt
- ¼ teaspoon (1.25 grams) baking soda
- 1 cup (85 grams) black cocoa powder
- 1½ cups (360 grams) hot brewed coffee or hot water
- 1 cup (240 grams) sour cream
- ¾ cup (168 grams) vegetable oil
- 1 tablespoon (13 grams) vanilla extract
- 3 large eggs (150 grams), room temperature
- Black Cocoa Buttercream (recipe follows)

1. Preheat oven to 325°F (170°C). Spray 3 (8-inch) round cake pans with baking spray with flour. Line bottom of pans with parchment paper.
2. In a large bowl, whisk together flour, brown sugar, baking powder, salt, and baking soda.
3. In a medium bowl, place cocoa; whisk in hot coffee or hot water until cocoa dissolves and mixture is smooth. Whisk in sour cream, oil, and vanilla until combined. Whisk in eggs. Add cocoa mixture to flour mixture, and whisk until no dry streaks remain. Divide batter among prepared pans (about 2½ cups or 678 grams per pan).
4. Bake until a wooden pick inserted in center comes out with a few moist crumbs, 40 to 45 minutes. Let cool in pans for 10 minutes. Invert cake layers onto wire racks, and let cool completely.
5. Using a large serrated knife, level cooled cake layers if desired.
6. Place 1 cake layer on a serving plate. Spread 1½ cups (about 300 grams) Black Cocoa Buttercream onto cake layer. Top with second cake layer, and spread 1½ cups (about 300 grams) buttercream on top. Top with remaining cake layer. Spread remaining buttercream on top and sides of cake as desired. Cover and refrigerate for up to 3 days.

Assemble your layer cakes with ease using our favorite cake lifter.
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Black Cocoa Buttercream

Makes 8 cups

- 2½ cups (567 grams) unsalted butter, softened
- 1 teaspoon (3 grams) kosher salt
- 6¼ cups (750 grams) confectioners' sugar
- 1¼ cups (106 grams) black cocoa powder
- 6 tablespoons plus 1 teaspoon (95 grams) heavy whipping cream
- 4 ounces (113 grams) bittersweet chocolate, chopped, melted, and cooled
- ¾ teaspoon (3 grams) vanilla extract

1. In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, beat butter and salt at medium speed until smooth.
2. In a large bowl, sift together confectioners' sugar and cocoa. With mixer on low speed, slowly add sugar mixture to butter mixture, about 1 cup at a time, alternately with cream, about 1 tablespoon (15 grams) at a time, beating until smooth after each addition and stopping to scrape bottom and sides of bowl and paddle. Slowly add melted chocolate, beating until well combined. Beat in vanilla. Increase mixer speed to medium, and beat until thick and fluffy, 1 to 2 minutes, stopping to scrape bottom and sides of bowl.

PRO TIP: *The frosting will gradually darken in color as it stands. Frosting can be made a day ahead and refrigerated in an airtight container. Let it come to room temperature and then whip it until light and fluffy before using.*

A LUXURIOUS LOAF

Contributing editor Edd Kimber created a chocolate loaf cake with the perfect amount of pure decadence

PHOTOGRAPHY, RECIPE DEVELOPMENT, AND STYLING BY
EDD KIMBER

London-based **Edd Kimber** (@theboywhobakes) is a baker, food writer, and TV personality who is the first-ever winner of *The Great British Bake Off*. Since his big win, Edd has authored seven cookbooks, including *Small Batch Bakes*, published in 2022, and *Small Batch Cookies*, published in 2024. He was the first contributing editor and guest editor of *Bake from Scratch* and has continued to be a frequent contributor to the magazine and a guest instructor at baking retreats. We're so excited to bring you Edd's unique small-batch recipes throughout the year.

➔ **Find Edd on Instagram at @theboywhobakes, on Substack (*eddkimber.substack.com*), and on his website, *theboywhobakes.co.uk*.**

BONUS RECIPE: Get Edd's Matcha Basque Cheesecake at ➔ *bakefromscratch.com*.

FLOURLESS CHOCOLATE CAKE WITH ROASTED STRAWBERRIES

Makes 4 servings

Flourless chocolate cakes are a bit of a contradiction, tasting wonderfully rich and chocolaty but also being incredibly light and mousse-y at the same time. If you want the cake to taste a little more fudgy, you can chill the cake and serve it straight from the refrigerator. To serve, I like to keep things simple and make some roasted strawberries and serve alongside a dollop of crème fraîche.

Flourless Chocolate Cake:

- **⅓ cup (76 grams) unsalted butter, diced**
- **2.64 ounces (75 grams) bittersweet chocolate, finely chopped**
- **2 large eggs (100 grams), separated**
- **¼ cup (55 grams) firmly packed light brown sugar**
- **2 tablespoons (24 grams) granulated sugar**
- **Pinch of cream of tartar**
- **Pinch of kosher salt**

Roasted Strawberries:

- **10.5 ounces (300 grams) fresh strawberries**
- **2 tablespoons (24 grams) granulated sugar**
- **2 tablespoons (30 ml) lemon juice**

- **Cocoa powder and crème fraîche, to serve**

1. Lightly grease a 9x5-inch loaf pan, and line with parchment paper. Preheat the oven to 350°F (180°C).

2. For flourless chocolate cake: Place the butter and the chocolate into a bowl set over a pan of simmering water, and heat, stirring occasionally, until fully melted. Remove the bowl from the heat, and set aside for the moment.

3. In a large bowl, add the egg yolks and brown sugar, and whisk together until thick and pale. Pour in the chocolate mixture, and whisk until smooth and combined.

4. Place the egg whites, the granulated sugar, cream of tartar, and salt into the bowl of a stand mixer (or use a hand mixer), and whisk on medium-high until the meringue holds soft peaks. Add the meringue to the chocolate batter in three additions, gently folding in each addition to avoid knocking out too much air. Once the batter is streak-free, pour the batter into the prepared loaf pan, and spread out into an even layer.

5. Bake until the cake is puffed and has a cracked crust, about 25 minutes. Remove from the oven, and set aside to cool. As the cake cools, it will collapse; don't worry—this is as designed.

6. For roasted strawberries: As the cake bakes, remove the green tops from strawberries, and slice each berry in half. Scatter on a small baking tray, and sprinkle on the sugar and lemon juice, stirring to coat evenly. When you remove the cake from the oven, place the strawberries into the oven, and bake until the fruit is soft and syrupy but still holding its shape, about 15 minutes. Remove, and set aside until ready to serve.

7. To serve, sift cocoa onto cake, slice into quarters, and serve alongside roasted strawberries and a dollop of crème fraîche.

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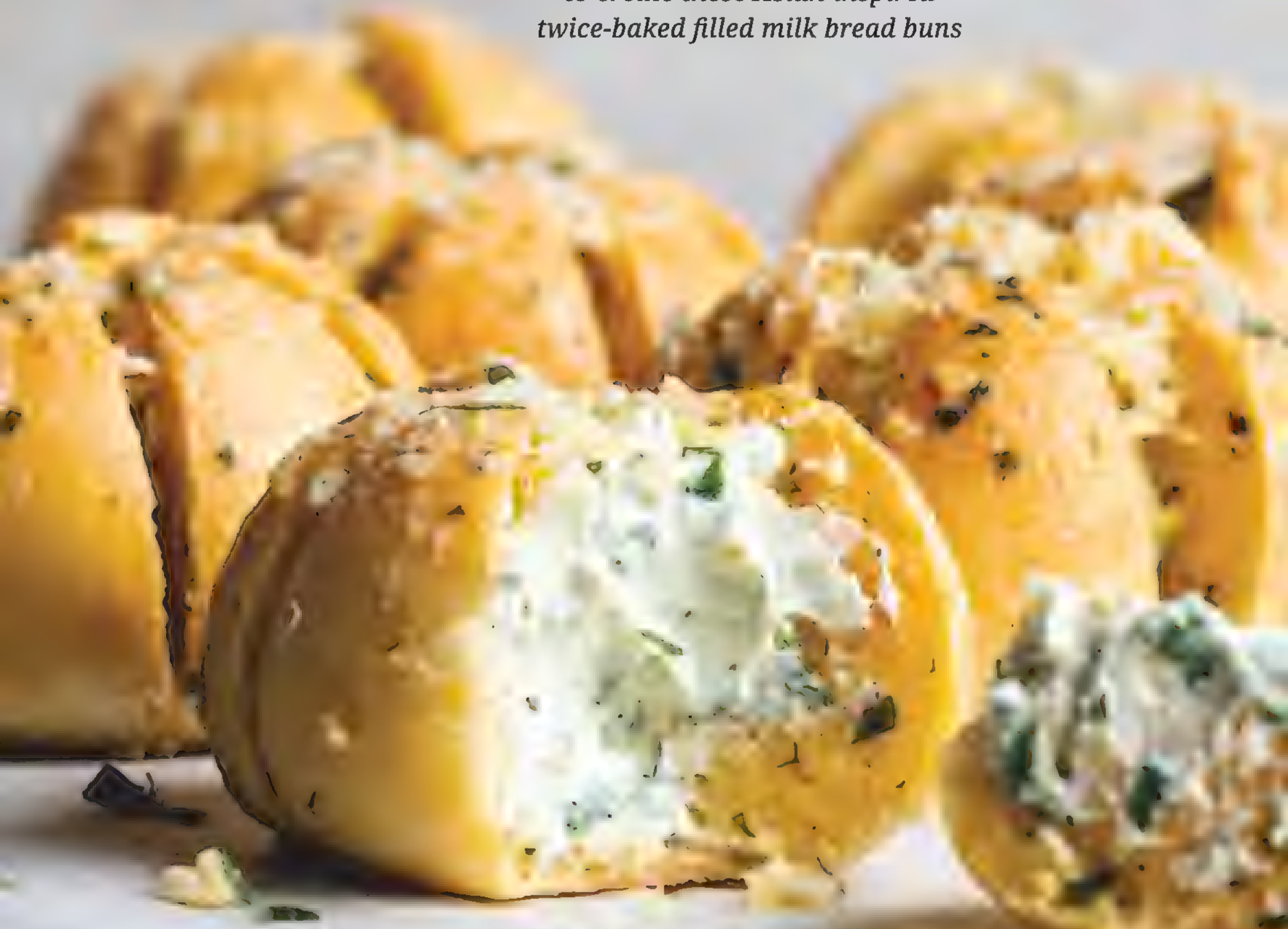
TWICE-BAKED AND TWICE AS NICE

One dough is used two ways to create these Asian-inspired twice-baked filled milk bread buns



Savory Garlic-Herb Cheese Buns, PAGE 25

PHOTOGRAPHY BY KYLE CARPENTER / FOOD STYLING BY AARON CONRAD / STYLING BY MAGGIE RATLIFF

Sweet Frangipane Almond Buns,
PAGE 25

SWEET FRANGIPANE ALMOND BUNS

Makes 12 buns

It's common in Chinese bakeries to find sweet buns filled with a thick and creamy custard. We used frangipane, one of our favorite creamy French fillings, for a nutty flavor spin on this Asian staple. A sprinkle of candied almonds on top adds subtle crunch.

Almond syrup:
- ¼ cup (50 grams) granulated sugar
- ¼ cup (60 grams) water
- ¼ teaspoon (1 gram) almond extract

Frangipane:
- ½ cup (113 grams) unsalted butter
- ½ cup (100 grams) granulated sugar
- 1 large egg (50 grams), room temperature
- ½ teaspoon (2 grams) almond extract
- ¼ teaspoon (1 gram) vanilla extract
- 1 cup (96 grams) almond flour
- ¼ cup (31 grams) all-purpose flour
- ½ teaspoon (1.5 grams) kosher salt

Milk Bread Buns (recipe on opposite page)
- ¼ cup (26 grams) candied sliced almonds (see Note)

1. Preheat oven to 325°F (170°C). Line a rimmed baking sheet with parchment paper.
2. For almond syrup: In a small saucepan, heat sugar and ¼ cup (60 grams) water over medium heat, stirring frequently, until sugar dissolves completely. Remove from heat; stir in almond extract. Let cool completely.
3. For frangipane: In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, beat butter and sugar at medium speed until and creamy, 2 to 3 minutes, stopping to scrape sides of bowl. Beat in egg until combined. Beat in extracts.
4. In a small bowl, whisk together flours and salt. With mixer on low speed, gradually add flour mixture to butter mixture, beating until just combined. Use immediately, or cover and refrigerate for up to 1 week.
5. Using a small serrated knife, cut Milk Bread Buns horizontally about ¼ inch from top; reserve tops. Using knife or a fork, hollow out bottom about ½ inch deep, leaving a ¼-inch rim around edges. (Discard bread from centers or reserve for another use.)
6. Using a pastry brush, generously brush inside of each bun with almond syrup. Spoon 2 tablespoons (30 grams) frangipane into each bun. Place on prepared pan.
7. Bake until buns are golden brown, 15 to 20 minutes. Let cool on pan for 5 minutes. Remove from pan, and let cool completely on a wire rack.
8. Top with reserved tops. Brush top of buns with almond syrup; sprinkle with candied almonds. Refrigerate in an airtight container for up to 3 days.

Note: *We topped these buns with the same crunchy candied almonds that we used on the Burnt Almond Torte from our May/June 2024 issue. Find the recipe at* bakefromscratch.com.

SAVORY GARLIC–HERB CHEESE BUNS

Makes 12 buns

In the late 2010s, bakeries in Seoul, South Korea, began promoting a creamy cheese- and herb-filled garlic bread bun on social media, and it quickly gained international exposure. Although garlic bread is beloved worldwide, what sets the Korean style apart is using soft enriched bread, a lightly sweetened whipped cheese filling, and egg-enriched garlic butter that sets the filling into a soft custardy consistency that bakes deep down into the fluffy bread roll.

Filling:
- 1 (8-ounce) package (226 grams) cream cheese, room temperature
- 2 teaspoons (8 grams) granulated sugar
- 1 teaspoon (3 grams) kosher salt
- ½ teaspoon (1 gram) ground black pepper
- ½ cup (38 grams) thinly sliced green onion
- 2 tablespoons (6 grams) chopped fresh parsley
- 2 tablespoons (30 grams) heavy whipping cream

Milk Bread Buns (recipe on opposite page)

Garlic butter:
- ½ cup (113 grams) unsalted butter, melted and cooled slightly
- 1 large egg (50 grams), room temperature
- 2 tablespoons (16 grams) minced garlic

1 tablespoon (3 grams) chopped fresh parsley
½ teaspoon (1.5 grams) kosher salt
¼ teaspoon paprika

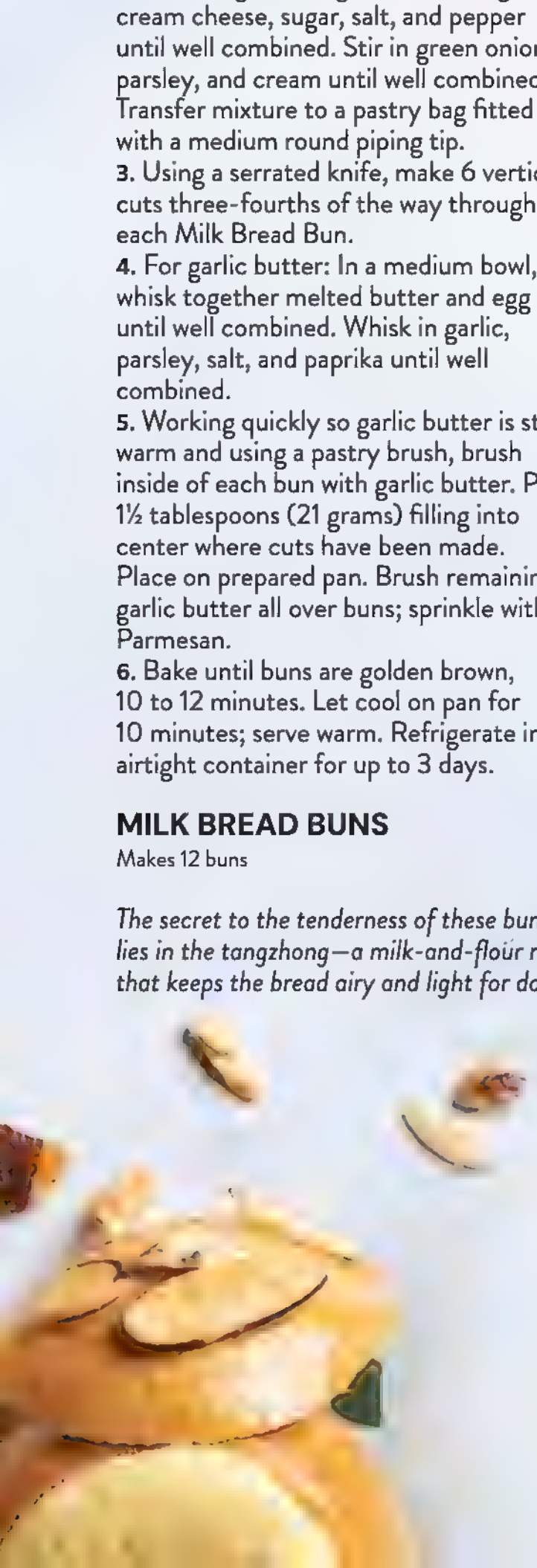
¼ cup (25 grams) freshly grated Parmesan cheese

1. Preheat oven to 350°F (180°C). Line a baking sheet with parchment paper.
2. For filling: In a large bowl, stir together cream cheese, sugar, salt, and pepper until well combined. Stir in green onion, parsley, and cream until well combined. Transfer mixture to a pastry bag fitted with a medium round piping tip.
3. Using a serrated knife, make 6 vertical cuts three-fourths of the way through each Milk Bread Bun.
4. For garlic butter: In a medium bowl, whisk together melted butter and egg until well combined. Whisk in garlic, parsley, salt, and paprika until well combined.
5. Working quickly so garlic butter is still warm and using a pastry brush, brush inside of each bun with garlic butter. Pipe 1½ tablespoons (21 grams) filling into center where cuts have been made. Place on prepared pan. Brush remaining garlic butter all over buns; sprinkle with Parmesan.
6. Bake until buns are golden brown, 10 to 12 minutes. Let cool on pan for 10 minutes; serve warm. Refrigerate in airtight container for up to 3 days.

MILK BREAD BUNS

Makes 12 buns

The secret to the tenderness of these buns lies in the tangzhong—a milk-and-flour roux that keeps the bread airy and light for days.



Tangzhong:
6 tablespoons (90 grams) whole milk
3 tablespoons (24 grams) bread flour

Dough:
⅔ cup (160 grams) whole milk
4 tablespoons (48 grams) granulated sugar, divided
2¼ teaspoons (7 grams) active dry yeast
2½ to 2¾ cups (318 to 350 grams) bread flour, divided, plus more for dusting
2 teaspoons (6 grams) kosher salt
2 large eggs (100 grams), room temperature and divided
¼ cup (57 grams) unsalted butter, room temperature
1 tablespoon (15 grams) water

1. For tangzhong: In a small saucepan, whisk together milk and flour until well combined. Cook over medium-low heat, whisking constantly, until thickened, whisk leaves lines on bottom of pan, and an instant-read thermometer registers 150°F (66°C). (Mixture will resemble mashed potatoes.) Transfer to a small bowl, and let cool until an instant-read thermometer registers 130°F (54°C) or until room temperature.
2. For dough: In a small saucepan, heat milk over medium heat until scalding (an instant-read thermometer registers 180°F/82°C). Remove from heat, and let cool until an instant-read thermometer registers 110°F (43°C) to 115°F (46°C).
3. In a small bowl, whisk together warm milk, 1 teaspoon (4 grams) sugar, and yeast. Let stand until foamy, 5 to 10 minutes.
4. In the bowl of a stand mixer, whisk together 1½ cups (191 grams) flour, salt, and remaining 3 tablespoons plus 2 teaspoons (44 grams) sugar by hand. Add cooled tangzhong, yeast mixture, and 1 egg (50 grams). Using the paddle attachment, beat at low speed until well combined. With mixer on low speed, gradually add 1 cup (127 grams) flour, beating just until a shaggy dough forms, stopping to scrape bottom and sides of bowl.
5. Switch to the dough hook attachment. Beat at low speed until dough is tacky, elastic, and slightly smooth, about 8 minutes; add up to remaining ¼ cup (32 grams) flour, 1 tablespoon (8 grams) at a time, if dough is too sticky. Add butter, 1 tablespoon (14 grams) at a time, beating until combined after each addition (about 5 minutes total).
6. Scrape sides of bowl and dough hook. Beat at low speed until dough is completely smooth and passes the windowpane test (see Note), about 12 minutes. Turn out dough onto a clean surface, and shape into a smooth round.
7. Lightly oil a large bowl. Place dough in bowl, turning to grease top. Cover and let rise in a warm, draft-free place (75°F/24°C) until doubled in size, 45 minutes to 1 hour.
8. Line baking sheets with parchment paper.
9. Punch down dough; turn out onto a lightly floured surface. Divide dough into 12 portions (about 60 grams). Shape each portion into a smooth ball; cover and let stand for 5 to 10 minutes.
10. Place balls 3 to 4 inches apart on prepared pans. Cover and let rise in a warm, draft-free place (75°F/24°C) until doubled in size, 1 to 1½ hours.
11. Preheat oven to 350°F (180°C).
12. In a small bowl, whisk together 1 tablespoon (15 grams) water and remaining 1 egg (50 grams); brush onto dough.
13. Bake until golden brown and an instant-read thermometer inserted in center registers 190°F (88°C), about 17 minutes. Let cool on pans for 10 minutes. Remove from pans, and let cool completely on a wire rack.

Note: *For the windowpane test, pinch or cut—but don't tear, because this damages the gluten strands—a small, walnut-size piece of dough. Then gently and slowly pull and rotate the dough out from its center. If the dough is properly kneaded, you will be able to stretch it—without tearing—until it's thin and translucent. If it tears or breaks during the stretch, give your dough another minute of work and then test again. If the dough is too hard to stretch, it's been overmixed.*

Sweet IMPACT

Unaware of his baking prowess, Robert Lucas took a chance and turned his new passion into a booming career

FROM KITCHEN NOVICE TO CAKE ARTIST

BY CHRISTINA FLEISCH / PHOTOGRAPHY BY ROBERT LUCAS

Robert Lucas, founder of The Sweet Impact, went from computers to cake and turned a baking whim into a booming business. Robert began his career working in IT after graduating from Georgia Southern University in 2016. One ordinary day in 2019, Robert was scrolling through social media when he came across a photo of a unique unicorn cake that left him intrigued. His niece was soon to have a birthday party with a unicorn theme, so Robert decided to re-create the cake he saw—even though he had zero baking experience. But the result was a stunning cake that took social media by storm. From then on, he was hooked on baking.

Robert's family is full of artists, so it's no surprise he discovered his hidden talent as well. In his spare time, Robert continued to watch videos and read books to learn more about baking. He began sharing his creations online, and his creative cakes soon became a TikTok sensation. Many of his bakes are beloved characters from shows and movies, but others are his own designs.

"My inspiration comes from my imagination as well as real-world objects," he says. "Design is everywhere, and I can turn these different elements into cake artistry." When asked about his favorites, Robert says, "I love making the character cakes—I find the challenge of getting the designs spot-on to be difficult but fun. A design that really captures my aesthetic is the spiral geode cake. It was a different take on a trend and showed how I can really become creative with design."

The design alone can take up to 10 hours. He begins with a sketch of the look he has in mind before planning the flavors of the cake itself. Robert aims for all his cakes to taste as good as they look and spends considerable time ensuring that everything from the layers and fillings to the frosting meets his standards before decorating. But Robert typically doesn't eat his own cakes; he much prefers to gift them.

Find Robert on social media at @thesweetimpact and his website, *thesweetimpactshop.com*.

For a while, most of Robert's cakes went to his IT coworkers, but in 2022, he decided to pursue baking full-time. After his TikTok culinary superstar status, Robert became a guest judge on Hulu's *Baker's Dozen*, in addition to being a full-time judge on Netflix's *The Big Nailed It Baking Challenge*. And although his star continues to rise, he makes a concerted effort to stay connected with his audience.

"I often ask what cake designs they would like to see next by holding polls, and this really helps me continue to create while also making things I know they would be interested in," he says. "Being on TV allows me to show more of my personality to the audience, which isn't usually seen on my social media."

When asked what advice he'd give to novice bakers, Robert says, "Just start! You can start with the basics and continually improve with each creation. Know that your first time baking will not look the same a year later, so be patient with yourself. I think this goes for anything in life; if you want to do something, just give it a shot and see what comes of it."

In April 2024, Robert opened his storefront in Statesboro, Georgia. The Sweet Impact is where he records his content and sells cupcakes, cookies, brownies, cheesecake jars—delicious layers of cream cheese atop crumbled graham crackers—and, of course, the stunning cakes he posts online. The Sweet Impact is not only the name of his brand but a part of his lifestyle. Robert gives back to his community, including supporting the Ronald McDonald House Charity, and inspires others to follow their passions while leaving a sweet impact on everyone they meet. "Trying my hand at cake artistry was one of the best things I've ever done for myself. It really was a little bit random how it all came together, but I'm so happy I explored my desire to find a new hobby, because it turned into something bigger than I could have ever imagined."

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It's Time to Bake

Mastering Techniques and Ingredients Behind Every Delicious Creation

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CAKE-BAKING 101

TEXT, FOOD STYLING, AND PROP STYLING BY KATIE MOON DICKERSON
PHOTOGRAPHY BY STEPHANIE WELBOURNE STEELE

There is something timeless about cake—the way it brings people together, the joy of that first bite, and the promise of something sweet and satisfying. But achieving a truly moist, bakery-quality cake at home can feel elusive. We've all been there, scrolling through blogs, contemplating recipes with bold claims like "How to Make a Box Mix Taste Like It Came from a Bakery!" Twelve-year-old Katie would have been excited to try these tips—adding an extra egg for "richness," swapping water for milk, or splashing in a little vanilla extract. It sounds so simple, so foolproof.

But then, the first bite reveals the truth. Dry. Dense. Disappointing. The dream of bakery-worthy cake crumbled before your very eyes. What goes wrong? The answer comes down to one word: protein.

The Science of a Tender Crumb

For a cake that's both fluffy and moist, the ingredients have to be balanced just right. Protein is essential for creating structure, but too much (or mishandled) protein can lead to dryness. And while most of us know not to overmix batter to avoid developing gluten (another protein culprit!), the story doesn't end there.

Let's talk liquids. If a recipe calls for water or buttermilk, resist the urge to swap in regular milk without understanding the consequences. It's a delicate dance. Milk contains enzymes that can inhibit gluten development, but buttermilk also has lactic acid. This acid lowers the pH of the batter, actively breaking down gluten strands and creating a more tender crumb.

➔ **No buttermilk on hand? Visit *bakefromscratch.com/buttermilk-substitutions* for our guide to emergency replacements.**

Think of gluten like a rubber band. Gluten prefers a slightly acidic environment, which keeps it relaxed and pliable like a slack, unstretched rubber band. But overmix your batter or overbake your cake and those protein bonds tighten like a pulled-taut rubber band, squeezing out every drop of moisture. The result is a cake so dry, you can't even give it away.

Eggs: Cake's Frenemy

Eggs are the unsung heroes of cake-baking. They provide structure, richness, and leavening, but they also have the potential to sabotage your crumb if mishandled. Egg yolks are your cake's best friend—they bring fat (hello, richness!) and emulsifiers, including lecithin, which coat the flour and inhibit gluten development.

Egg whites are tricky, though. Comprised of just protein and water, they're the biggest culprit behind dryness. But they can't be left out—egg whites provide the foam and lift that are essential for light, airy cakes such as sponges and meringues. The secret lies in balance: enough eggs to create structure but not so many that they dry out your cake.

Baked to Perfection

Even if your ratios are perfect, the oven can still betray you. Some cakes, like chocolate or red velvet, are especially deceptive due to their color. They might look done on the outside or pass the wooden pick test, but lurking within could be a dry, overbaked crumb waiting to happen.

My golden rule is to invest in an instant-read thermometer. A properly baked, non-yeasted cake should reach an internal temperature of 200°F (93°C) to 205°F (96°C). No more guessing games. No more heartbreak. I've always preached that the contestants on *The Great British Bake Off* would dominate the technical challenges if they just embraced this humble tool.

So, the next time you're whipping up a cake, remember this: Balance your proteins, trust your thermometer, and take care with details and methods. Stay curious and bake boldly!

Baking Fail

These cakes started with the same recipe, but the results are vastly different. The bottom cake was mixed and baked just right, resulting in a light, fluffy crumb with the perfect texture for which we all strive. The top cake wasn't so lucky. By adding an extra egg, swapping water for milk, overmixing, and overbaking, it ended up being a dense, dry, rubbery cake with a tight crumb. The culprit? Too much protein from the extra egg and more gluten formation caused by overmixing. Visual proof that small changes can have a significant impact on your final bake.

Find these products and more of our favorite cake-baking equipment at *bakefromscratch.com/shoptheissue*.

My Favorite Tools

For a budding cake decorator, I recommend affordable, multipurpose tools, and you probably already have some of them in your kitchen

Long serrated knife, preferably at least 9 inches, like a bread knife.

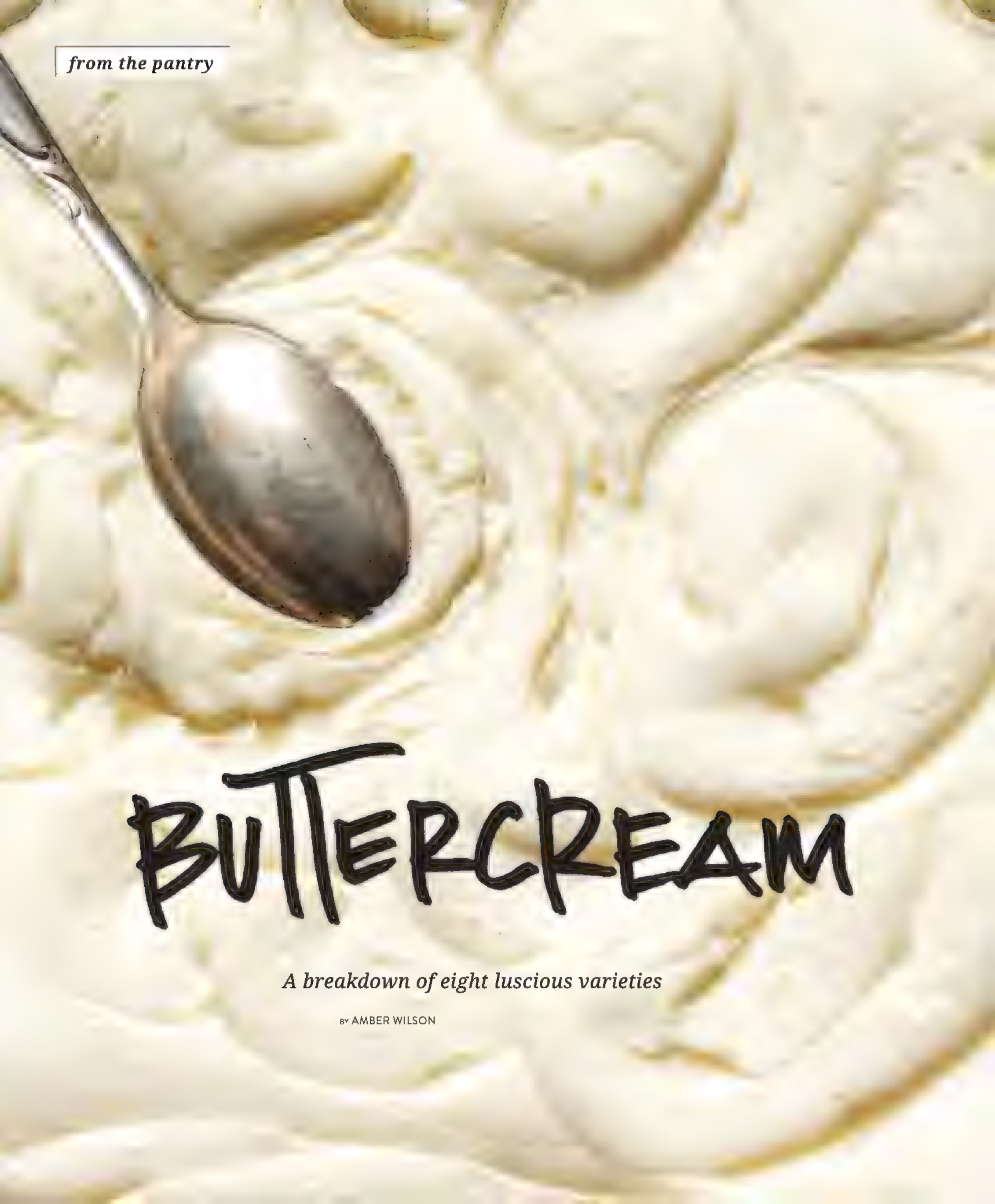
Piping tips. At least one large (minimum ½-inch opening) open star piping tip or large French star piping tip (for cupcakes or large borders) and one large round piping tip.

Light-colored aluminum pans for layer cakes. Dark pans can overbake your cake easily (you have to adjust the temperature and time), and there are many variables that can go wrong.

A long, wide spatula and an offset spatula. I use Ateco #1306 (6 inches long and 1½ inches wide) for creating swoops in icing and Ateco #1385 as my standard offset spatula.

Ateco #335 14 Piece Cake Decorating Set. It has 12 piping tips that I use regularly and includes a coupler and a reusable pastry bag.

Cake turntable. It's impossible to decorate cakes without this essential tool.



BUTTERCREAM

A breakdown of eight luscious varieties

BY AMBER WILSON

Frosting is that sweet, soft embrace elevating a simple cake into something truly celebratory—each slice has the power to be a portal to cherished memories. I still vividly picture my childhood birthday cake: a tender yellow sponge swirled with almond- and vanilla-scented American buttercream and happily covered in a cascade of sprinkles. The thought of this cake always makes me smile.

Then there's my dark chocolate and almond cake dressed in a silky, gleaming chocolate Swiss buttercream. It graces my table at the end of intimate candlelit dinners, every bite revealing the care and attention lavished on making loved ones feel special—even if the flickering candlelight cleverly hides any little imperfections! In these moments, frosting almost becomes a language of its own—a lush whisper of nostalgia and the warmth of connection that binds us together.

By its simplest definition, buttercream is a type of frosting made by creaming together sugar and a generous amount of butter. Within this seemingly straightforward foundation lies a world of complexity and charm. Let's take a closer look at eight versatile varieties of buttercream that hold their shape beautifully when piped, each one offering its own unique expression of flavor and texture to enrich your baking repertoire.

We often hear foods like buttercream described by their "mouthfeel," but what does that actually mean? Mouthfeel is how food connects with us as we eat, the sensation that lingers beyond taste. Imagine the burst of juice from a sun-warmed strawberry or the soft, creamy richness of vanilla buttercream as it melts on your tongue. It's the personal experience that defines how we feel about our food and how our food makes us feel, bite by bite.

AMERICAN BUTTERCREAM

butter + confectioners' sugar + heavy whipping cream

American buttercream, also known as no-cook buttercream, is a classic, fluffy blend of butter and sugar—not to mention it's one of the easiest to whip up. The beauty of using confectioners' sugar lies in its fine texture; it dissolves effortlessly into the butter, creating a smooth, creamy frosting without a hint of grit. Plus, the cornstarch in the sugar lends added stability to the buttercream. A splash of vanilla and heavy cream elevates the creaminess, creating a texture you simply can't achieve with butter and sugar alone. American buttercream develops a lightly flaky crust as it sets, making it ideal for intricate piping, while remaining soft and luscious beneath.

CREAM CHEESE BUTTERCREAM

butter + cream cheese + confectioners' sugar

The true beauty of cream cheese buttercream lies in its balance: The fresh acidity from the cream cheese cuts through the sweetness, making it the ideal companion for cakes with a rich, spiced, or slightly tangy profile. It pairs beautifully with red velvet, carrot, chocolate, and citrus cakes, as the frosting's creamy texture and subtle tang balance out their sweetness perfectly.

RUSSIAN BUTTERCREAM

butter + sweetened condensed milk

Russian buttercream doesn't require a complicated method or multiple steps—it's made from just butter and sweetened condensed milk. Simply beat the two ingredients together until they form a creamy, airy frosting that can be spread or piped with ease. The texture is smooth and luxurious, with a slightly denser feel compared to other buttercreams. It's a lovely balance of sweet and rich but without an overpowering sweetness. This buttercream might be less well-known than others, but it's a hidden gem that surprises people with its velvety texture and natural sweetness.

GERMAN BUTTERCREAM

butter + pastry cream

German buttercream begins with a rich, silky base of pastry cream—a comforting custard made by cooking milk, sugar, egg yolks, and cornstarch until thickened. Once cooled, the pastry cream is blended with butter and whipped to a smooth, light consistency. The result is a wonderfully fluffy, rich frosting with a soft, custardy texture that holds its shape without becoming overly stiff.

What makes German buttercream so appealing is its nostalgic, comforting flavor. It has a delicate sweetness that feels less indulgent but equally satisfying. The flavor is light and mellow, with a soft and airy texture almost reminiscent of ice cream. This makes it an ideal companion for spiced cakes or fruit-based cakes, where it enhances the flavor without overpowering it.

ERMINE BUTTERCREAM

butter + roux + sugar

Ermine buttercream, also known as boiled milk frosting, is nostalgic, with an understated elegance. It's made by

cooking a simple mixture of flour and milk or water until it thickens and then cooling it down before gradually beating in sugar and butter. The result is a buttercream with a texture as smooth and luxurious as an ermine's white fur, which is how it earned its name. First popularized in the late 19th century, it was the perfect pairing for chocolate mahogany cake, an early version of what would later become red velvet cake.

What truly sets ermine buttercream apart is its modest amount of butter and sugar compared to other buttercreams, so it's less sweet and rich. And that light, almost whipped cream-like texture makes it unique—airy, billowy, yet still with enough richness to give each bite a satisfying mouthfeel.

ITALIAN MERINGUE BUTTERCREAM

butter + Italian meringue

Italian buttercream is the most stable of all buttercreams. It's beautifully balanced, light in texture, and not too sweet. Its magic lies in its base of Italian-style meringue, where the delicate sweetness of sugar is softened by the airy texture of whipped egg whites.

To create this meringue, a hot sugar syrup is carefully streamed into egg whites while they're being whisked. The result is a glossy, silky meringue that forms the perfect foundation. Once the meringue has cooled to the touch and reached stiff peaks, small cubes of softened butter are incorporated one at a time. The butter is absorbed slowly, transforming the mixture into a glossy, sturdy buttercream.

SWISS MERINGUE BUTTERCREAM

butter + Swiss meringue

Swiss buttercream is also made with a meringue base, but unlike an Italian meringue, egg whites and sugar are whisked together directly over a double boiler, which allows the mixture to warm gradually. Once the mixture reaches the right temperature, it's transferred to a stand mixer and whipped into a silky-smooth meringue.

Next, small cubes of butter are gradually added to the meringue. At first, the mixture may seem like it will split, but it will come back together—I promise! Simply trust the process and continue adding the remaining butter while whisking. It will eventually come together in a velvety-smooth texture. What I love about Swiss buttercream is its subtle sweetness and airy quality that complements a variety of cakes, from the lightest sponge to the most decadent chocolate, enhancing their flavor instead of overpowering them.

FRENCH BUTTERCREAM

butter + pâte à bombe

What sets French buttercream apart from other buttercreams is its base of *pâte à bombe*, a cooked sugar syrup whisked into egg yolks to create a luscious, custard-like texture. The technique begins by carefully heating the sugar syrup to the soft-ball stage (around 240°F/115°C) and then slowly streaming it into egg yolks while whisking. The process results in a glossy, smooth mixture with a depth of flavor that's incomparable.

Once the pâte à bombe is whipped into a silky base, the real magic happens when butter is added gradually. The butter emulsifies with the egg yolk mixture, creating a light and decadent frosting with a beautiful balance of sweetness and a subtle, almost savory depth. Making pâte à bombe requires some patience, but it's well worth it!

A cake draped in buttercream isn't a necessity for survival; it's a pure indulgence, a celebration of pleasure—of being alive. Each unassuming ingredient, though quiet on its own, speaks volumes through the alchemy of baking, allowing us to express feelings we sometimes struggle to put into words. It's how we say, "I'm thinking of you," "I love you," or even "I'm sorry." To quote Victor Borge, "Laughter is the shortest distance between two people"—that and sharing a slice of cake.

Find these spatulas and spoonulas at *bakefromscratch.com/shop.*

ICING, FROSTING, OR BUTTERCREAM?

These terms are often thrown around synonymously in the realm of baking, but each has its own unique characteristics. **ICING** can range from a thin, glossy glaze that hardens as it sets—perfect for creating a delicate sheen or enhancing intricate details—to a more substantial coating that adds additional sweetness and decorative elegance. **FROSTING**, by contrast, is thicker and fluffier, lending itself beautifully to a generous, cloudlike layer on cakes and cupcakes. **BUTTERCREAM** is the crown jewel of frostings. Rich and velvety, made from butter and sugar (sometimes with a splash of cream or milk for that perfect consistency), it has a smoothness that's both luxurious and versatile. It holds its shape well, making it perfect for piping. In essence, all buttercream is frosting but not all frosting is buttercream; icing sits in its own category, with its thinner charm.

TROUBLESHOOTING BUTTERCREAM

SOUPY MERINGUE BUTTERCREAM

If your meringue buttercream turns out too soupy or looks broken after you've added the butter, it's likely because the meringue base was still too warm when the butter was added. The heat from the meringue melts the butter, causing it to separate. But don't worry—there are simple fixes! While the mixer is running, place ice around the outside of the mixing bowl. You can also place the mixer bowl of buttercream in the fridge for a few minutes. Both of these help to cool down and solidify the butter to fully incorporate into the meringue, restoring its fluffy texture.

LUMPY MERINGUE BUTTERCREAM

If your meringue buttercream has stubborn lumps of butter that won't incorporate, it's usually because the butter was too cold when added. To fix this, gently warm the outside of your metal bowl (not glass!) with a kitchen torch or wrap the bowl with a warm towel. This will soften the butter enough for it to emulsify and combine with the meringue.

RUNNY AMERICAN BUTTERCREAM

If American buttercream looks broken or too runny, it's likely because there's too much liquid in the mix. To fix this, simply add more confectioners' sugar, about ¼ cup (30 grams) at a time, until you reach the desired consistency.

ALL ABOUT frosting

Watch editor-in-chief Brian Hart Hoffman prepare each of these buttercreams in the All About Frosting series on the *Bake from Scratch* YouTube channel.

Subscribe now so you never miss a delicious moment: *youtube.com/bakefromscratch.*

FLAVORING BUTTERCREAM

These ingredients bloom beautifully in buttercream as the fat in the butter pulls out and deepens their flavor. As the buttercream stands, the flavors become even more pronounced.

NATURAL BEAUTIES: If you want your buttercream to sing with natural flavors, look no further than freeze-dried fruits. Whether it's strawberries, blueberries, or mango, pulverizing these vibrant fruits into a fine powder and adding them to your buttercream will infuse it with a pure, concentrated taste, as well as tint it a lovely color.

CHOCOLATE LOVERS' DREAM: For chocolate buttercream, consider using melted chocolate, but make sure the chocolate is cool before mixing it in—this will give your buttercream an indulgent depth and a glossy finish. If you prefer cocoa powder, always choose a good-quality unsweetened Dutch process cocoa powder to deepen the flavor without overpowering the sweetness.

CITRUS ZEST FOR FRESHNESS: A little citrus zest can dramatically lift your buttercream, adding a fresh, aromatic note that cuts through the richness. Just a teaspoon or so of zest goes a long way.

VERY VANILLA: Vanilla is the pillar of countless buttercreams, but try vanilla bean paste instead of extract for something more complex. It's richer, with a deeper flavor profile, and you get the lovely specks of vanilla seeds throughout the frosting, which adds a touch of elegance.

WARMING SPICES: A pinch of spice such as cinnamon, nutmeg, or cardamom can warm your buttercream, perfect for pairing with spiced cakes. Add a dash of ginger for an extra bite or a touch of ground red pepper for an unexpected kick.

strawberries and cream WEDDING CAKE

WEDDING PHOTOGRAPHY BY MACKENZIE LEIGH PHOTOGRAPHY
RECIPE DEVELOPMENT BY AMANDA STABILE
FOOD STYLING BY KATIE MOON DICKERSON
RECIPE PROP STYLING BY COURTNI BODIFORD

This wedding cake was born out of friendship and thoughtful collaboration between the bride and her family and editor-in-chief Brian Hart Hoffman and the Bake from Scratch *team—built on shared moments, trust, and a genuine love for creating something beautiful together*

When Kelsey Phinney first met editor-in-chief Brian Hart Hoffman at the *Bake from Scratch* Paris baking retreat in 2021, little did she know that the *Bake from Scratch* team would become central to one of the most memorable moments of her wedding day. "I had such a great time with my mom at that retreat," Kelsey recalls. "So, when she asked me to join her in Birmingham, Alabama, for the 2022 holiday retreat, I was all in. That's when everything changed."

It was during that retreat, as Kelsey and her mom, Tammy, caught up with Brian and test kitchen director Laura Crandall, that the idea of a wedding cake came up. Kelsey had just gotten engaged, and as they baked, Brian—always full of enthusiasm—asked about her wedding plans. "He was one of the first people I showed my dress to," Kelsey says with a laugh.

But they talked most about the cake. When Brian asked her who would be making it, she said she hadn't thought about it yet. Kelsey recalls, "Without hesitation, Brian said, 'We'll do it!' I thought maybe he'd had one too many mimosas or got carried away. But he meant it! I couldn't believe it."

Tammy reflects on the deeper connection they'd built with the *Bake from Scratch* team. "I met Brian at the very first retreat, in San Francisco in 2019. The 2024 Holiday Baking retreat was my eighth or ninth retreat, so we've really become family." She describes how Brian and Laura were not just making a cake but creating something deeply personal for Kelsey and her fiancé. "When they started working on the design, they asked Kelsey to share every detail of the wedding—colors, theme, flowers—so they could make the cake truly representative of her."

On the day of the wedding, Laura and baking and pastry editor Katie Moon Dickerson arrived in Charlottesville, Virginia, to assemble the cake. "They were working in the tiniest kitchen in the guesthouse," Kelsey says with a laugh, "and with the groomsmen running around! But they did it—and it was absolutely stunning."

For Kelsey, the cake was more than just a dessert—it was a lasting symbol of the bonds she has forged with the *Bake from Scratch* team and the love and care they had poured into every detail. "I'll always be grateful to Brian and the team for making it happen. It was the most magical cake, and I'll treasure the memory forever."

More Is More

The style of decorative piping used on this cake is called the Lambeth method, also known as Victorian piping or English overpiping. This ornate, highly decorative technique, traditionally crafted with royal icing, is having quite the revival. And with its timeless yet modern appeal, it's easy to see why.

While "Lambeth" is a household name among cake decorators today, for those not in the know, it's named after Joseph Lambeth, an American decorator who perfected this intricate art form throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Everything about the symmetrical patterns and bold flourishes was designed to captivate, much like the grand, ornate rooms and opulent architecture of the Victorian era. Think gilded salons and lavish palaces, where excess wasn't just accepted but expected.

The Components

VANILLA WHITE CAKE: The foundation of this cake is a light and fluffy yet sturdy vanilla white cake. The recipe is flexible and can be scaled to create three distinct tiers—6-, 9-, and 12-inch cakes—plus a 13x9-inch sheet cake for extra servings, which makes it an ideal choice for both grand wedding cakes and more intimate gatherings.

VANILLA SIMPLE SYRUP: Soaking the cake layers in simple syrup is the secret to keeping the cake moist and flavorful. Infused with vanilla, the syrup elevates the subtle flavor of the cake and adds a gentle sweetness without overwhelming the palate.

STRAWBERRY CREAM FILLING: Fresh strawberries are roasted to intensify their flavor and then blended with a fluffy mixture of cream cheese and heavy whipping cream. The filling is light yet luxurious, offering the perfect balance to the vanilla cake and buttercream.

VANILLA AMERICAN BUTTERCREAM: This smooth, creamy buttercream is the perfect foil to the strawberries. Its buttery richness provides a lush texture that melts in your mouth. The addition of heavy cream gives the buttercream a soft, velvety consistency, making it easy to work with and perfect for creating smooth layers and beautiful decorations.

Kitchen Confidants

Here are a few kitchen essentials that will help you create a cake worthy of any celebration

Round pans—typically 6-inch, 9-inch, and 12-inch—are the perfect trio for creating a classic tiered cake. These sizes allow you to build height and dimension, ensuring each layer is beautifully proportioned. With them, you can achieve a striking visual balance while serving differing numbers of guests.

A **rectangular cake pan** is essential for baking sheet cakes, which are perfect for serving larger crowds and can be decorated with the same elegance as tiered cakes.

A **serrated knife** is your best friend when it comes to leveling cakes. Unlike a straight-edged knife, the serrated blade will help you cut through the sponge without disturbing the delicate crumb. Use it to trim off the tops of your layers so they sit evenly, ensuring each tier is perfectly level and ready for frosting.

Each tier of the cake should be placed on its own **cake board** to ensure both structure and stability. Use appropriately sized greaseproof or plastic boards to match to the dimensions of your tiers. If you choose greaseproof boards, tape two together with the greaseproof sides facing out to prevent moisture from the cake from weakening the board's structure. These boards are essential for easy handling and transferring of layers and to keep the assembled cake stable and prevent it from shifting or collapsing as you stack and decorate.

A **cake turntable** is key for smooth, even piping and frosting. As you work with your buttercream, a turntable allows you to rotate the cake effortlessly, ensuring a flawless finish all the way around. This tool is a must for getting crisp, clean edges on your tiers and makes decorating a lot easier by giving you full 360-degree access.

Wooden dowels are the unsung heroes of cake assembly. They provide support to your stacked tiers and keep them from toppling over. Once you've assembled each tier, insert these dowels into each except for the topmost tier. The 12-inch wooden dowels are long enough to give your cake the strength it needs, and they can be cut to size to perfectly fit each tier using a PVC pipe cutter.

A **cake lifter** is particularly helpful when working with larger or tiered cakes, allowing you to lift and transfer your creations without worrying about damaging them. A sturdy cake mover will help you slide the cake off the turntable and onto your final cake plate or display stand with ease.

With a **squeeze bottle**, you can drizzle a thin, consistent layer of Vanilla Simple Syrup onto the cake layers, allowing them to absorb the liquid without oversaturating any areas. It's far more precise than using a spoon or pouring directly, giving you the freedom to work in small, controlled amounts. This ensures the cake stays moist—not wet—with just the right balance of flavor and texture.

A **large offset spatula** is your go-to for spreading buttercream onto your cake. The long, offset blade allows you to glide on the surface with control, ensuring an even and smooth layer of frosting. A **small offset spatula** is ideal for adding fine details to your cake, especially around the edges, or for working in tight spaces between tiers.

Using a **level** when making a wedding cake is essential for ensuring each tier sits perfectly straight. It's a small but crucial step that guarantees your tiers align beautifully and your cake stays steady, no matter how many layers it has.

Lightly misting the cake with water from a **spray bottle** before a finishing pass with a small offset spatula or bench scraper helps to even out the consistency of the buttercream and create a smooth, polished exterior.

An **arc ruler** helps you pipe symmetrical curves and delicate borders with ease. It's especially useful

for wedding cakes, where uniformity and elegance are essential, allowing each design element to flow seamlessly across the tiers.

A sturdy **pastry bag** is indispensable for all your piping work. The flexible material allows you to squeeze with ease and precision, and it can be fitted with different piping tips to create a range of beautiful designs. And switching between tips is easy with the help of a **piping coupler**, which allows you to change designs without needing to swap out your bag.

A Touch of Purple

Butter's natural yellow hue comes from beta-carotene, a pigment found in the grasses and plants cows eat. This beta-carotene gets absorbed into the milk and transferred into the butterfat during the churning process. But when you're whipping up buttercream and aiming for a pristine white finish, the natural yellow tint of butter can be a bit of a nuisance. Here's where a little food coloring works magic. It might sound counterintuitive to add a color that's technically opposite to yellow, but a tiny drop of purple works wonders. It helps cancel out those warm yellow tones, leaving you with a clean, neutral white—perfect for wedding cakes or any confection that requires a flawless, elegant finish.

Assembling Your Masterpiece

The secret to creating a multitiered wedding cake is staying organized and giving yourself plenty of time. Start by baking your layers in advance and letting them cool completely before you assemble. Use a serrated knife to level the cakes so they can stack evenly. Then soak a layer with Vanilla Simple Syrup to keep the cake moist, and add the Strawberry Cream Filling. Once your layers are stacked, spread a light coat of buttercream over the entire cake, pop it in the fridge to set, and finish with a smooth final layer of buttercream.

Level cake layers to make each cake 1½ to 2 inches tall and flat. Place a 12-inch layer on a 14-inch silver wrapped cake drum or 16- to 18-inch cake plate/stand, using a small amount of buttercream to secure it to the board. If the cake needs to sit on a smaller board for space or to transport, build it onto a 12-inch board instead.

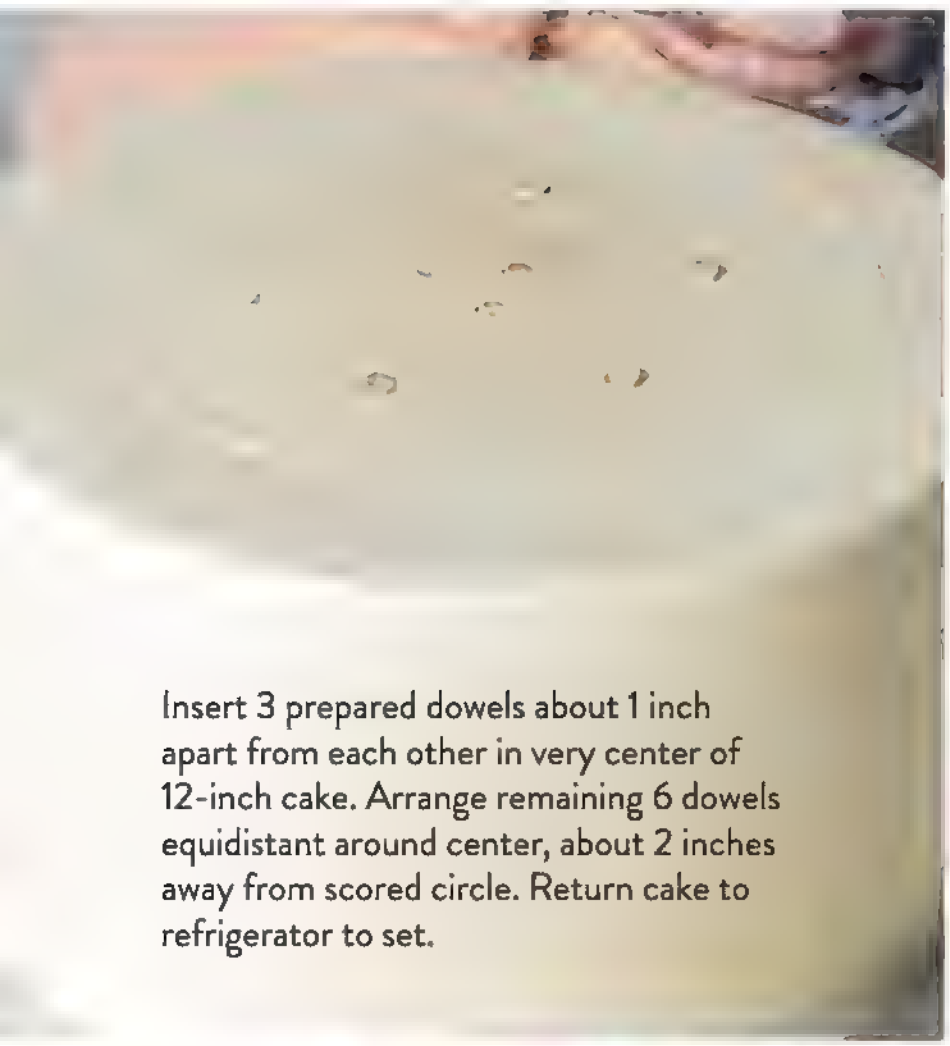
Pour Vanilla Simple Syrup into a squeeze bottle, and generously soak cake layer.

Spoon buttercream into a pastry bag, and cut a ½-inch opening in tip. Pipe a border of buttercream around edge of cake layer. Spoon 3 cups (645 grams) Strawberry Cream Filling onto cake layer, and spread within border. Repeat with second cake layer, soaking layer with syrup and topping with remaining filling. Top with final 12-inch cake layer. Using a level each time you add a layer of cake ensures your tiers align perfectly and your cake remains steady.

Spread a thin layer of buttercream on top and sides of cake, scraping off excess. Refrigerate until frosting is set, at least 20 minutes. The first light layer of buttercream, known as the crumb coat, is applied to a cake before the final, smooth finish. It's not about perfection—it's about creating a base that locks in loose crumbs and provides a clean surface to work with.

Remove 12-inch cake from refrigerator. Spread buttercream on top and sides of cake, using an offset spatula or bench scraper to smooth. At this stage, a light mist of water from a spray bottle helps the offset spatula or bench scraper glide smoothly over the surface, leaving you with a perfectly smooth, flawless finish.

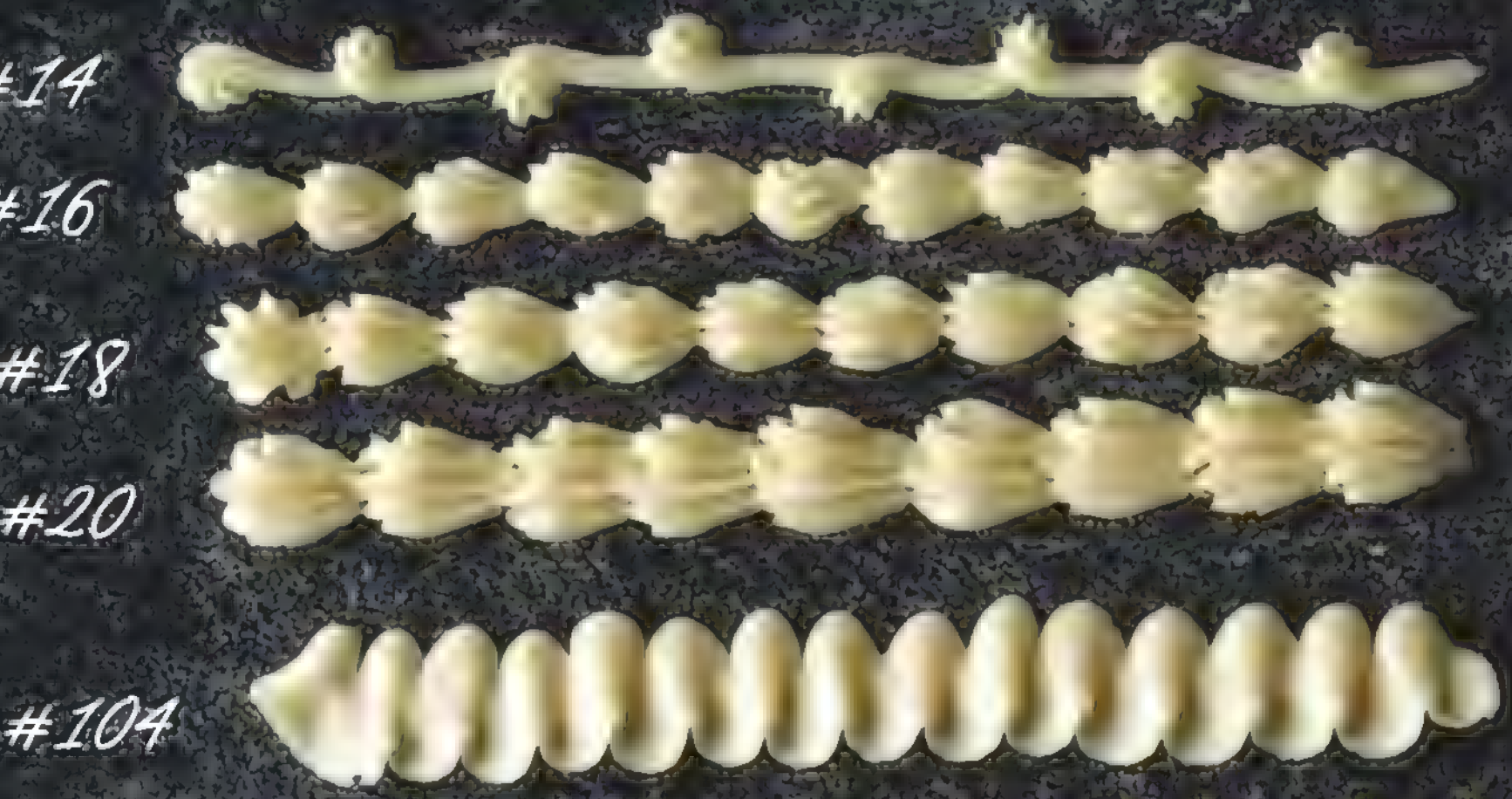
Mark center of 12-inch cake with a 9-inch cake board. Using a wooden pick, score perimeter of cake board. Insert a wooden dowel into center of 12-inch cake, and mark where dowel meets buttercream. Remove dowel, and use as a guide to cut remaining dowels to same length.

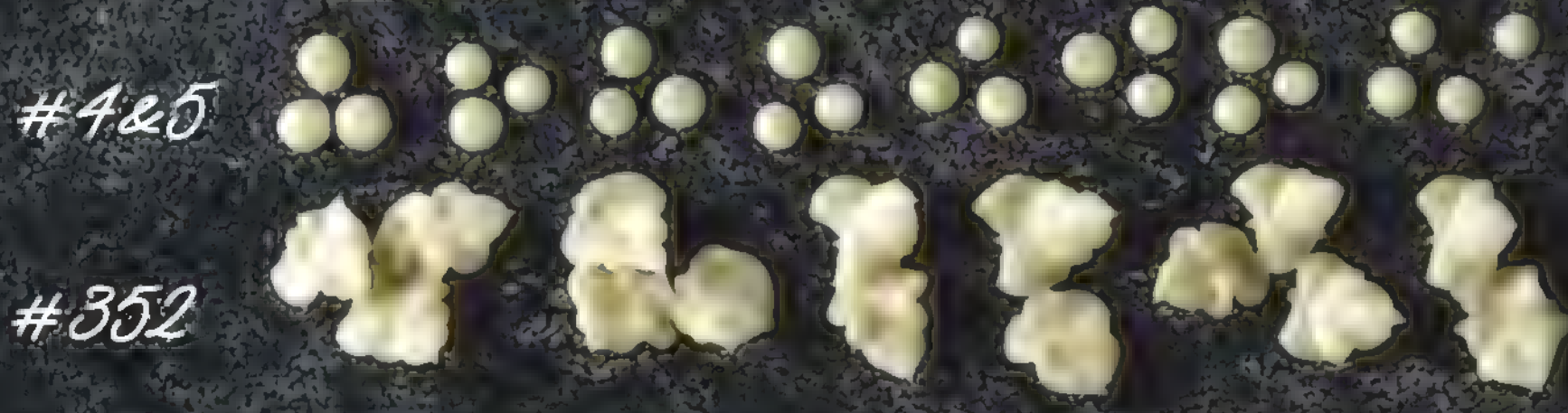


Insert 3 prepared dowels about 1 inch apart from each other in very center of 12-inch cake. Arrange remaining 6 dowels equidistant around center, about 2 inches away from scored circle. Return cake to refrigerator to set.

Using frosting reserved for decoration, pipe designs on outside of cake layers as desired. When not decorating, keep cake layers refrigerated.

Place 12-inch cake tier, with cake board, on desired cake plate. Stack 9-inch and 6-inch tiers, with the boards they are on, on top. Let cake stand at room temperature for at least 1 hour before serving.





Perfecting Every Detail, One Tip at a Time

Whether you're adding delicate shell borders or bold, ruffled edges, each piping tip has its specialty, and knowing when to use them can elevate your cake decorating. A coupler is essential for this process; it lets you switch between tips without wasting buttercream, making it indispensable for multitiered creations with an array of designs.

Use Wilton Nos. 14, 16, 18, and 20 for elegant shell details with clean edges. For precise, detailed piping, Wilton Nos. 4 and 5 are small enough to add intricate touches in tight spaces. For ruffled edges, Wilton No. 104 is the go-to. Use Wilton No. 352 to create textured leaf patterns.

Piping Tips

Follow along and you'll have a
masterpiece that's piped to perfection

CHILL YOUR CAKE LAYERS: Before you start piping, make sure your cake layers are fully chilled (not frozen). This makes it easier to handle the cake and helps the buttercream stay firm and smooth as you pipe. Cold cakes are much less likely to shift or crumble, providing a stable base for your design.

CONSISTENCY IS KEY: The consistency of your buttercream can make or break your piping results. Before decorating, test the buttercream on a piece of parchment paper to ensure it's smooth, easy to pipe, and firm enough to hold its shape. If the buttercream is too aerated, fold with a rubber spatula to pop air bubbles or gently tap the bowl on the countertop to release bubbles. These bubbles can cause issues when piping and create an uneven final coat. When you're ready to start, hold your pastry bag at a 45-degree angle to the cake's surface. This allows for even pressure, ensuring smooth and consistent lines. Gentle pressure and steady, fluid movements will give your piping those clean, sharp edges.

PIPING ON THE CAKE: When piping around the sides of the cake, start at the bottom and work your way up to create neat, symmetrical rows. Gently squeeze your pastry bag, lift it slightly to form each dot or rosette, and ensure a slight overlap to make each design flow seamlessly. For a flawless finish, use a lightly dampened fingertip or paintbrush to press down any peaks on dots or other designs. And an arc ruler can be a game changer—rest it against the cake's surface to create small indentions that you can then pipe your design onto with precision.

STAY CALM: No matter how perfect your technique, it's important to stay calm and enjoy the process. If a line isn't exactly as you envisioned, use a small offset spatula to smooth it out. If the buttercream starts to soften or you feel rushed, don't hesitate to pop the cake back into the fridge for a quick chill. The more relaxed you are, the more fluid and natural your piping will be.

DON'T OVERFILL YOUR PASTRY BAG: A common mistake is overfilling your pastry bag, which can make it difficult to control the flow and result in uneven pressure and messes. Fill your pastry bag about two-thirds full (or just halfway for even more control!) to allow the frosting to move freely while still giving you the precision you need. Twist the top of the bag tightly to maintain steady pressure as you pipe, ensuring each swirl and line turns out just as you intended.

PRACTICE FIRST: Don't forget to practice before tackling your cake. Spend a few minutes familiarizing yourself with the pastry bag on a piece of parchment paper or a spare plate. This will help you get a feel for how the frosting flows, the pressure needed for different designs, and how each piping tip behaves. With a little preparation and patience, you'll pipe with confidence and create a cake that's beautiful.

STRAWBERRIES AND CREAM WEDDING CAKE

Makes 1 (6-, 9-, and 12-inch) tiered cake and 1 (2-layer) 13x9-inch cake

The combination of strawberries and cream immediately evokes romance and celebration. Each layer strikes a perfect balance: the lightness of vanilla cake, the decadence of buttercream, and the sweet-tart punctuations of roasted strawberries. The beauty of this cake lies in its simplicity and timeless quality—each bite conjures the feeling of spring afternoons and the gentle sweetness of sun-ripened strawberries. It's a cake for a day you want to remember, and whether you're creating a grand three-tiered wedding masterpiece or a one-layer sheet cake, this cake will make any occasion unforgettable.

Vanilla White Cake

6-inch cake

Makes 3 layers

- ½ cup (113 grams) unsalted butter, softened
- 1⅓ cups (267 grams) granulated sugar
- 3 tablespoons (42 grams) neutral oil
- 3 large egg whites (90 grams), room temperature
- 2 teaspoons (8 grams) vanilla extract
- 2¼ cups (281 grams) all-purpose flour
- 1½ teaspoons (7.5 grams) baking powder
- ½ teaspoon (1.5 grams) kosher salt
- ½ cup (120 grams) whole milk, room temperature
- ¼ cup (60 grams) sour cream, room temperature

9-inch cake

Makes 3 layers

- 1¼ cups (284 grams) unsalted butter, softened
- 3⅓ cups (667 grams) granulated sugar
- ½ cup (112 grams) neutral oil
- 7 large egg whites (210 grams), room temperature
- 4 teaspoons (16 grams) vanilla extract
- 5¾ cups (719 grams) all-purpose flour
- 3¾ teaspoons (18.75 grams) baking powder
- 1½ teaspoons (4.5 grams) kosher salt
- 1¼ cups (300 grams) whole milk, room temperature
- ⅔ cup (160 grams) sour cream, room temperature

12-inch cake

Makes 1 layer*

- ¾ cup plus 2 tablespoons (198 grams) unsalted butter, softened
- 2⅓ cups (467 grams) granulated sugar
- ⅓ cup (75 grams) neutral oil
- 5 large egg whites (150 grams), room temperature
- 1 tablespoon (13 grams) vanilla extract
- 4 cups (500 grams) all-purpose flour
- 2½ teaspoons (12.5 grams) baking powder
- 1 teaspoon (3 grams) kosher salt
- ¾ cup plus 2 tablespoons (210 grams) whole milk, room temperature
- 7 tablespoons (105 grams) sour cream, room temperature

**This recipe needs to be made three times to create the whole 12-inch tier.*

Sheet cake

Makes 1 (2-layer) 13x9-inch cake

- 1 cup (227 grams) unsalted butter, softened
- 3 cups (600 grams) granulated sugar
- 7 tablespoons (98 grams) neutral oil
- 6 large egg whites (180 grams), room temperature
- 4 teaspoons (16 grams) vanilla extract
- 5 cups (625 grams) all-purpose flour
- 3¼ teaspoons (16.25 grams) baking powder
- 1¼ teaspoons (3.75 grams) kosher salt
- 1 cup (240 grams) whole milk, room temperature
- 7 tablespoons (105 grams) sour cream, room temperature

1. Preheat oven to 325°F (170°C). For 6- and 9-inch cakes: Spray 3 (6-inch) and 3 (9-inch) round cake pans with baking spray with flour. Line bottom of pans with parchment paper. For 12-inch cake: Spray a 12-inch round cake pan with baking spray with flour. Line bottom of pan with parchment paper. For sheet cake: Spray 2 (13x9-inch) baking pans with baking spray with flour. Line bottom of pans with parchment paper.

2. In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, beat butter, sugar, and oil at medium speed until fluffy, 3 to 4 minutes, stopping to scrape sides of bowl. Add egg whites, one at a time, beating well after each addition. Beat in vanilla.

3. In a medium bowl, whisk together flour, baking powder, and salt. In a small bowl, whisk together milk and sour cream. With mixer on low speed, gradually add flour mixture to butter mixture alternately with milk mixture, beginning and ending with flour mixture, beating just until combined after each addition. Spoon batter into prepared pans (about 1½ cups or 327 grams each for 6-inch pans; about 3½ cups or 820 grams each for 9-inch pans; about 3½ cups or 995 grams each for sheet pans), using a small offset spatula to smooth tops. Firmly tap pans on a kitchen towel-lined counter 3 to 4 times to settle batter and release any air bubbles.

4. Bake until golden brown and a wooden pick inserted in center comes out clean, 30 to 35 minutes for 6-inch layers, 45 to 50 minutes for 9-inch layers, 45 to 50 minutes for 12-inch cake, and 30 to 35 minutes for sheet cakes. Let cool in pans for 10 minutes. Remove from pans, and let cool completely on wire racks.

5. Level cooled cake layers for flat top. (If preparing ahead of time, wrap each cake layer separately in plastic wrap, and freeze until ready to use. Let thaw overnight in refrigerator before using.)

Vanilla American Buttercream

6-inch cake

Makes about 4½ cups

- 2 cups (454 grams) unsalted butter, softened
- 1 teaspoon (3 grams) kosher salt
- 5 cups (600 grams) confectioners' sugar*
- 2½ tablespoons (37.5 grams) heavy whipping cream
- 2 teaspoons (8 grams) vanilla extract
- ½ to 1 drop purple liquid food coloring (optional)

9-inch cake
Makes about 7 cups

3 cups (681 grams) unsalted butter, softened
1¼ teaspoons (3.75 grams) kosher salt
7 cups (840 grams) confectioners' sugar*
¼ cup (60 grams) heavy whipping cream
2½ teaspoons (10 grams) vanilla extract
2 to 3 drops purple liquid food coloring (optional)

12-inch cake
Makes about 10 cups

3½ cups (794 grams) unsalted butter, softened
1½ teaspoons (4.5 grams) kosher salt
8½ cups (1,020 grams) confectioners' sugar*
5 tablespoons (75 grams) heavy whipping cream
1 tablespoon (13 grams) vanilla extract
4 to 5 drops purple liquid food coloring (optional)

Sheet cake
Makes about 7 cups

3¼ cups (738 grams) unsalted butter, softened
1½ teaspoons (4.5 grams) kosher salt
7¼ cups (870 grams) confectioners' sugar*
¼ cup (60 grams) heavy whipping cream
2½ teaspoons (10 grams) vanilla extract
3 to 4 drops purple liquid food coloring (optional)

Piping decoration
Makes about 5½ cups

2½ cups (567 grams) unsalted butter, softened
1 teaspoon (3 grams) kosher salt
5¾ cups (690 grams) confectioners' sugar*
3 tablespoons (45 grams) heavy whipping cream
2 teaspoons (8 grams) vanilla extract
1 to 2 drops purple liquid food coloring (optional)

1. In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, beat butter and salt at medium speed until smooth and creamy. With mixer on low speed, gradually add confectioners' sugar, beating until combined and stopping to scrape bottom and sides of bowl. Beat in cream and vanilla. Increase mixer speed to high, and beat until pale and fluffy, 1 to 2 minutes. Add food coloring (if using) to brighten the frosting. (See Note.) Use immediately, or store in an airtight container at room temperature for up to 2 days or refrigerate for up to 1 week. If refrigerated, let come to room temperature and beat at medium-high speed with the paddle attachment to soften and smooth before using.

**We used C&H® Powdered Sugar.*

Note: *Butter made from grass-fed cows is rich in beta-carotene, which gives butter its lovely, golden hue. But when you want a pure white frosting, adding a few drops of purple food coloring offsets the butter's natural yellow tint.*

Vanilla Simple Syrup

Makes about 4 cups

- **3 cups (600 gams) granulated sugar**
- **3 cups (720 grams) water**
- **2 tablespoons (26 grams) vanilla extract**

1. In a medium saucepan, bring sugar and 3 cups (720 grams) water to a boil over medium heat, stirring frequently until sugar dissolves. Remove from heat; stir in vanilla. Let cool completely before using. Store in an airtight container for up to 3 weeks.

Strawberry Cream Filling

6-inch cake

Makes about 1 cup

- **8 ounces (226 grams) fresh strawberries, hulled and quartered**
- **¼ cup (50 grams) plus 1 tablespoon (12 grams) granulated sugar, divided**
- **4 ounces (113 grams) cream cheese, softened**
- **⅓ cup (80 grams) cold heavy whipping cream**
- **½ teaspoon (2 grams) vanilla extract**

9-inch cake

Makes about 3 cups

- **1 pound (454 grams) fresh strawberries, hulled and quartered**
- **½ cup (100 grams) plus 2 tablespoons (24 grams) granulated sugar, divided**
- **1 (8-ounce) package (226 grams) cream cheese, softened**
- **1 cup (240 grams) cold heavy whipping cream**
- **1 teaspoon (4 grams) vanilla extract**

12-inch cake

Makes about 6 cups

- **2 pounds (907 grams) fresh strawberries, hulled and quartered**
- **1¼ cups (250 grams) granulated sugar, divided**
- **2 (8-ounce) packages (454 grams) cream cheese, softened**
- **2 cups (480 grams) cold heavy whipping cream**
- **2 teaspoons (8 grams) vanilla extract**

Sheet cake

Makes about 2 cups

- **1 pound (454 grams) fresh strawberries, hulled and quartered**
- **½ cup (100 grams) plus 2 tablespoons (24 grams) granulated sugar, divided**
- **6 ounces (170 grams) cream cheese, softened**
- **⅔ cup (160 grams) cold heavy whipping cream**
- **1 teaspoon (4 grams) vanilla extract**

1. Preheat oven to 375°F (190°C). Line a large rimmed baking sheet with foil.
2. In a medium bowl, toss together strawberries and sugar (1 tablespoon/12 grams for 6-inch, 2 tablespoons/24 grams for 9-inch, ¼ cup/50 grams for 12-inch, or 1 tablespoon/12 grams for sheet cake) until combined. Spread in a single layer on prepared pan.
3. Bake until berries are very soft, dark in color, and fragrant and juices have thickened, 30 to 45 minutes, stirring every 15 minutes. Let cool completely on pan. Roughly chop strawberries to ensure no large pieces remain.
4. In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the whisk attachment, beat cream cheese and remaining sugar (¼ cup/50 grams for

6-inch, ½ cup/100 grams for 9-inch, 1 cup/200 grams for 12-inch, or ½ cup/100 grams for sheet cake) at medium speed until smooth, about 2 minutes, stopping to scrape bottom and sides of bowl. With mixer on low speed, slowly add cold cream. Thoroughly scrape bottom and sides of bowl; add vanilla. Slowly increase mixer speed to high, beating until stiff peaks form, about 1 minute. Gently fold in roasted strawberries. Use immediately.

ASSEMBLY

Serrated knife
Ruler
1 (6-, 9-, and 12-inch) round cake board
1 (13x9-inch) cake board
Cake turntable
12-inch wooden dowels
PVC pipe cutter or a small saw to cut dowels to size

DECORATION

Pastry bags
Piping tips (Wilton Nos. 4, 5, 14, 16, 18, 20, 104, and 352)
Piping couplers
Cake lifter/mover
Squeeze bottle
Bench scraper
Large offset spatula
Small offset spatula
Scissors
14-inch silver wrapped cake drum or 16- to 18-inch decorative cake plate
Florals (see Note)

1. Trim tops of all cake layers to make each 1½ to 2 inches tall. Place a 12-inch layer on a 14-inch silver wrapped cake drum or 16- to 18-inch cake plate/stand, using a small amount of buttercream to secure it to the board. If the cake needs to sit on a smaller board for space or to transport, build onto a 12-inch board instead.
2. Pour Vanilla Simple Syrup into a squeeze bottle, and generously soak cake layer.
3. Spoon buttercream into a pastry bag, and cut a ½-inch opening in tip. Pipe a border of buttercream around edge of cake layer. Spoon 3 cups (645 grams) Strawberry Cream Filling onto cake layer, and spread within border. Repeat with second cake layer, soaking layer with syrup and topping with remaining filling. Top with final 12-inch cake layer. Spread a thin layer of buttercream on top and sides of cake, scraping off excess. Refrigerate until frosting is set, at least 20 minutes.
4. Repeat entire procedure with 9-inch cake layers, building on a 9-inch cake board and using 1½ cups (323 grams) filling between each layer, and 6-inch cake layers, building on a 6-inch cake board and using ½ cup (108 grams) filling between each layer.
5. For sheet cake, place 1 cake layer on a 13x9-inch cake board; soak with syrup. Pipe a border of buttercream along edges, and fill with Strawberry Cream Filling. Top with second cake layer, and spread a thin layer of buttercream on top and sides of cake. Refrigerate until frosting is set.
6. Remove 12-inch cake from refrigerator. Spread buttercream on top and sides of cake, using an offset spatula or bench scraper to smooth. Mark center of 12-inch cake with a 9-inch cake board. Using a wooden pick, score perimeter of cake board. Insert a wooden dowel into center of 12-inch cake, and mark where dowel meets buttercream. Remove dowel, and use as a guide to cut remaining dowels to same length.
7. Insert 3 prepared dowels about 1 inch apart from each other in very center of 12-inch cake. Arrange remaining 6 dowels equidistant around center, about 2 inches away from scored circle. Return cake to refrigerator to set.
8. Repeat scoring and doweling process on 9-inch cake using a 6-inch cake board to mark center.
9. Using frosting for decoration, pipe designs on outside of cake layers and sheet cake as desired. When not decorating, keep cake layers refrigerated.
10. Place 12-inch cake tier, with cake board, on desired cake plate. Stack 9-inch and 6-inch tiers, with the boards they are on, on top. Let tiered cake and sheet cake stand at room temperature for 1 hour before serving.

Note: *The bride and groom adorned their cake in fresh florals with stems covered in plastic wrap before being added to the cake and removed the florals before serving.*

gold standard

THE BEST BAKE FOR YOUR brew

Percolate over this irresistible coffee cake

PHOTOGRAPHY BY KYLE CARPENTER / RECIPE DEVELOPMENT BY OLA AGBODZA
FOOD STYLING BY KATIE MOON DICKERSON
STYLING BY MAGGIE RATLIFF

Despite what its name implies, coffee cakes do not actually contain any coffee. This treat is a variation of *kaffeekuchen*, a German cake—traditionally a one-layer spice cake with a streusel topping—that's enjoyed with coffee. Lore holds that coffee cake originated from the German tradition of *kaffeeklatsch*, which translates to "coffee gossip" and is a social gathering to chat over a cup of joe and a little something sweet. You can find endless variations of heavily spiced, nut-filled, layered, and glazed coffee cakes, but so often, the simplest version is the best. We challenged ourselves to create the ultimate coffee cake with three key aspects: a moist, tender cake; a thin filling running through the center; and a buttery, crunchy streusel topping.

Grab our favorite **digital scale** and this **pottery bowl** at ***bakefromscratch.com/shoptheissue.***

When a cake has both a filling and a topping, it's important that the batter is thick enough to support each while baking without becoming dense and dry. We began our recipe development by baking a simple spice cake using butter for flavor and oil for moisture to be sure we liked its overall taste and texture. Though the cake was perfectly moist and tender, we knew we'd need a stiffer batter to hold the filling and topping. However, we were mindful to maintain the soft crumb of the cake.

To keep the cake as perfectly moist and tender as we could, we used sour cream in the batter. Sour cream brings moisture without thinning out the batter, which is important in a cake like this. It's also higher in fat than other dairy products, which gives your cake even more of a velvety texture. The acid in sour cream reacts with the baking soda in the batter and helps the cake rise and turn golden brown as it bakes, and sour cream's subtle tang is a nice foil to the sweet filling and topping.

Some coffee cakes use the same streusel for both the topping and a filling, but we wanted a ribbon of sweet spice inside and a crunch on top. After spreading half the batter into the pan, we sprinkled on a layer of cinnamon and brown sugar stirred together, taking care to leave a border of batter around the sides of the pan. (If the sugar touches the sides of the pan, it will melt and burn and ruin your beautifully simple creation.) The remainder of the batter is gently spread onto the filling, again taking care not to spread the sugar mixture to the sides of the pan.

Streusel—the defining factor for a coffee cake versus a regular spice cake—can turn your coffee cake from good to great. Streusel is a simple blend of flour, sugar, and butter that's formed into clumps, but whether you use melted butter, room temperature butter, or cold butter makes a difference. Melted butter allows the clumps to come together faster and yields clumps with a smooth, uniform texture when baked. (Be sure your melted butter has cooled slightly so it doesn't melt the sugar when stirring everything together.) Cold butter has a harder time incorporating the ingredients and can yield dry, powdery clumps that crumble like sand. Streusel made with room temperature or softened butter will be smoother than when made with cold butter but flakier than when made with melted. Finally, refrigerating the streusel before baking helps the clumps stay together during baking. Gently break the mixture into pieces of your desired size as you sprinkle it onto the batter.

As the cake bakes, all that's left is to put on a pot of coffee, inhale your kitchen's rich aromas, and look forward to the simple pleasure of a homemade treat.

CLASSIC COFFEE CAKE

Makes 1 (8-inch) cake

This rich, buttery cake is layered with a generous swirl of cinnamon sugar and topped with a sweet, crunchy streusel, offering up a delightful balance of textures and flavors. Pair a slice with a cup of your favorite coffee or tea.

Topping:

- ¾ cup (94 grams) all-purpose flour
- ⅓ cup (67 grams) granulated sugar*
- 1 tablespoon (6 grams) ground cinnamon
- ½ teaspoon (1.5 grams) kosher salt
- ⅓ cup (76 grams) unsalted butter, melted
- 1 teaspoon (4 grams) vanilla extract

Cake:

- ⅔ cup (150 grams) unsalted butter, room temperature
- 1 cup (200 grams) granulated sugar
- ½ cup (110 grams) firmly packed light brown sugar*, divided
- ⅓ cup (75 grams) neutral oil
- 2 large eggs (100 grams), room temperature
- 2½ teaspoons (10 grams) vanilla extract
- 2½ cups (313 grams) all-purpose flour
- 1½ teaspoons (7.5 grams) baking powder
- 1¼ teaspoons (3.75 grams) kosher salt
- ¼ teaspoon (1.25 grams) baking soda
- 1 cup (240 grams) sour cream, room temperature
- 1 teaspoon (2 grams) ground cinnamon

Garnish: confectioners' sugar*

1. For topping: In a medium bowl, whisk together flour, granulated sugar, cinnamon, and salt. Using a fork, stir in melted butter and vanilla until well combined and mixture is crumbly. Refrigerate until ready to use.
2. Preheat oven to 350°F (180°C). Spray an 8-inch square baking pan with baking spray with flour. Line pan with parchment paper, letting excess extend over all sides of pan.
3. For cake: In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, beat butter, granulated sugar, ¼ cup (55 grams) brown sugar, and oil at medium speed until light and fluffy, 3 to 4 minutes, stopping to scrape bottom and sides of bowl. Add eggs, one at a time, beating well after each addition. Beat in vanilla.
4. In a medium bowl, whisk together flour, baking powder, salt, and baking soda. With mixer on low speed, gradually add flour mixture to butter mixture alternately with sour cream, beginning and ending with flour mixture, beating until just combined after each addition and stopping to scrape bottom and sides of bowl.
5. In a small bowl, whisk together cinnamon and remaining ¼ cup (55 grams) brown sugar.
6. Spread half of batter (about 2½ cups or 595 grams) into prepared pan. Sprinkle cinnamon sugar onto batter, leaving a ½-inch border on all sides. Using an offset spatula, carefully spread remaining batter onto cinnamon sugar. Sprinkle topping all over batter.
7. Bake until edges are golden brown and an instant-read thermometer inserted in center registers 205°F (96°C), 1 hour to 1 hour and 10 minutes. Let cool in pan for 10 minutes. Using excess parchment as handles, remove from pan, and let cool slightly on a wire rack. Best served warm. Garnish with confectioners' sugar, if desired. Store in an airtight container for up to 3 days.

**We used C&H® Granulated, Light Brown, and Powdered Sugars.*

cover recipe

UNDERSTANDING THE ELEMENTS OF BAKING

BY AMBER WILSON

RECIPES, PHOTOGRAPHY, AND ILLUSTRATIONS EXCERPTED FROM THE BOOK *SIFT* BY NICOLA LAMB. COPYRIGHT ©2024 BY NICOLA LAMB. PHOTOGRAPHS COPYRIGHT ©2024 BY SAM A HARRIS. ILLUSTRATIONS COPYRIGHT ©2024 BY NUEKER. PUBLISHED IN THE UNITED STATES BY CLARKSON POTTER, AN IMPRINT OF CROWN PUBLISHING GROUP, A DIVISION OF PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE LLC, NEW YORK.

Nicola Lamb's captivating debut, SIFT, *explores the essential ingredients that form the foundation of great bakes and seamlessly guides readers through the techniques that underpin and connect with her wonderful recipes*

Nicola Lamb's *SIFT* is the kind of book you want to curl up with in a cozy corner, a cup of tea in hand, ready to lose yourself in the wonderful world of baking. But it's not just a collection of recipes—it's a guide that invites you to fall in love with the process, not just the end result. Whether you're a complete beginner or a professional baker, this book has something to teach, inspire, and remind you of the magic that happens when ingredients come together.

Nicola's journey into baking is a story of passion, nostalgia, and a deep love for sharing the joy of the process. Reflecting on her journey, she shares, "*SIFT* is dedicated to my Nanny Carole and her brownies, which my sisters and I were obsessed with growing up. I suppose that was my first introduction to how much joy baking brings other people and how it symbolizes care and affection. Though I baked a bit, sometimes with Carole, when I was little (she did all the hard bits), it wasn't until I left home and moved to London at 18 that I picked baking up as a hobby."

There was a moment of doubt before fully committing to a career in baking, but Nicola soon realized that her love for it only deepened. As she says, "A few years later, just before I went into a professional kitchen, I was worried that making baking my 'career' rather than just a hobby might ruin it, but the love has only grown!"

Nicola went on to train in some of the world's most celebrated kitchens and work with masters like Dominique Ansel and Yotam Ottolenghi. She brings a wealth of experience to this book but with a warmth and accessibility that immediately makes you feel at home. "I owe everything to the amazing teachers in my life—from the chefs who stood by my side and watched as I tentatively added eggs into choux paste to writers like Harold McGee, Paula Figoni, Francisco Migoya, and Samin Nosrat, to name a few, whose work I've poured over. I'm incredibly grateful." It's clear from the start that for Nicola, baking is a deeply personal journey—one built on learning, discovery, and a whole lot of patience.

When it comes to the most challenging recipe Nicola has worked on, her experience with hand-laminated croissants stands out. "Writing a recipe for hand-laminated croissants that gets great results took a long time," she reflects. "I started that recipe in 2020, and it took so long to nail that I questioned my pastry chef abilities!"

Even with years of experience working in a bustling production bakery, making thousands of croissants a week, Nicola found that translating that high-volume process to a home kitchen was anything but straightforward. She recalls that figuring out what to adjust in the formula inspired her to understand ingredients on a deeper level. This journey didn't just shape her croissant recipe—it also led to a new approach in documenting her creative process in her weekly Substack newsletter called Kitchen Projects and, eventually, in *SIFT*.

"With *SIFT*, I wanted to write the book I wished I had when I started baking. Back then, I was intimidated by a lot of the big, heavy books aimed at professionals, but I wanted more detail than home baking books, which often skim over technical details." Her goal was clear: Create approachable, reliable base recipes paired with enough technical depth to educate and empower bakers to understand the why behind the methods. The result is a resource you can turn to time and time again, whether you're just starting out or refining your skills.

The first part of *SIFT* feels almost like a love letter to the science of baking, which, if you're anything like me, will have you swooning. The front half of the book is in-depth information on baking's key ingredients—flour, eggs, sugar, and fat—plus guides on texture, color, how foods rise, and technical components such as temperature, indicators of doneness, and proper techniques.

Nicola unpacks the role of each ingredient with clarity. Take eggs, for example: She doesn't just tell you what's in an egg; she takes you deep into the world of fat, protein, and water and shows you how each part works together to create something wonderful. It's fascinating, and while it might sound a little technical, Nicola's voice is so inviting that you'll find yourself leaning in to learn more.

If you've ever wondered why things rise the way they do, how to create a makeshift proofing chamber, or what exactly happens during caramelization, this section is for you.

SUGAR IN ACTION

GRANULAR

Hazelnut Amaretti

Victoria Sponge

French Meringue

Panela Custard Tart

Financier

DARKEST

LIGHTEST

Maple Buttercrunch

Chocolate Peanut Ice Cream Bars

Toasted Flour Chiffon Cake

Choconut Tart

Golden Syrup Buttercream

Italian Meringue

LIQUID

Find Nicola Lamb on Instagram at @nicolalamb, at *nicolalamb.com*, and at *kitchenprojects.substack.com*. Her debut cookbook, *SIFT: The Elements of Great Baking*, is available now.

Nicola's passion for the science behind baking is infectious, and the detailed diagrams and charts she includes make the trickiest concepts feel like something you're eager to understand. She reminds us that learning to ask "why" is one of the most important lessons in baking, and once you start pulling at those threads, it's amazing how everything connects in the bigger picture.

As Nicola says, "This book and its recipes were specifically designed to be buildable, depending on your mood and confidence level." Once you've got a handle on the basics, Nicola introduces her "base recipes"—things like puff pastry, pie dough, milk bread, brioche, and choux pastry. These are more than just recipes; they're opportunities to refine the skills that will make more-complex bakes feel like second nature. There are no flashy photos to distract you, no unnecessary flourishes—just clear, detailed instructions and thoughtful notes that guide you through each step.

Then come the recipes themselves. This is where Nicola's creativity truly shines. She takes familiar bakes and adds her own twist—like a Baked Lemon Custard Brûlée or Chocolate Squiggly Loaves that turn *pain au chocolat* into something even more irresistible. And let's not forget the French Toast Cinnamon Buns, a playful nod to two favorite breakfasts. The recipes are organized by time commitment, so you can choose what fits your schedule—from quick afternoon treats to more-involved weekend projects. And if you need a little refresher on a technique, Nicola includes handy references to earlier chapters so you can brush up before diving back in.

When it comes to her behind-the-scenes creative process, Nicola is a self-proclaimed spreadsheet enthusiast. "The first thing I do once I've thought of a flavor combination or texture I'm after is start a new spreadsheet," she shares. For Nicola, it's the perfect way of organizing the chaos and diving into the science behind her creations.

Her approach is about understanding how each ingredient interacts to create the perfect result. Nicola explains that she begins by analyzing the core elements using the basic "rules" of recipe development. For instance, sugar and fat are key to making things tender and soft, while flour works as a "toughener," giving structure. So, if she wants something soft, she knows it'll need a higher ratio of sugar and fat. On the other hand, if she wants to introduce a new liquid, like sour cream, she might reduce the number of eggs in the mix to keep everything in perfect harmony. "Baking is all about balance," she says. And it's this mindset that allows her to consistently create recipes with the perfect texture and flavor.

"All the recipes have techniques embedded within them, which means you'll begin to notice how different bakes are connected," she explains. It's like a giant web of knowledge, where every new thing you learn is another thread joining everything together. "I wanted this book to feel like a giant investigation board all connected with string so you can really build confidence in baking and see how it's all linked!"

But perhaps the most charming part of *SIFT* is Nicola's reminder that failure is part of the journey. "There will be burned crusts, pastry stuck to pans, unset jellies, and everything in between," she says. "But try not to let these knock your confidence. Failures are a crucial part of the learning journey." She adds, "Don't be afraid to make mistakes or ask questions. I know it's frustrating, but it's how we learn."

This refreshing blend of science, art, and pure joy makes baking feel like an eternal adventure. Sure, some recipes are challenging, but that's where the fun lies. Baking is a practice, and with Nicola as your guide, you'll not only gain the technical know-how but also the confidence to tackle even the most ambitious bakes.

In the end, *SIFT* is more than just a cookbook—it's an invitation to explore, experiment, and savor the process. Because, as Nicola wisely says, "Any journey that ends with cake is worth taking." And I couldn't agree more.

FRENCH TOAST CINNAMON BUNS

Makes 10 buns

These are the softest and most tender cinnamon buns you'll ever have. Giving your buns the French toast treatment is probably the most luxurious thing you can do. I mean, who doesn't want to have a custard bath? You can (and should) try applying this technique to any and all buns for extra squidginess.

Tangzhong Bun Dough (recipe follows)
Egg Wash (recipe follows)

Spiced butter:
120 grams (½ cup) butter, softened
60 grams (¼ cup) demerara sugar
60 grams (¼ cup) packed light brown sugar
1 to 2 grams (¼ to ½ teaspoon) flaky sea salt
2 grams (1 teaspoon) ground cardamom
3 grams (2 teaspoons) ground cinnamon

Cinnamon bun soak:
200 grams (¾ cup plus 2 tablespoons) whole milk
2 whole eggs (100 grams)
20 grams (2 tablespoons) granulated sugar
20 grams (4 teaspoons) dark spiced rum
1 vanilla pod, scraped

Tangy butterscotch icing:
100 grams (½ cup) packed light brown sugar
20 grams (4 teaspoons) water
1 teaspoon apple cider vinegar
40 grams (3 tablespoons) butter
1 teaspoon dark spiced rum
Pinch of flaky sea salt

1. Make the Tangzhong Bun Dough. Press down the dough onto a tray, wrap well, and chill in the fridge overnight to proof. You can also place it in the freezer for 30 minutes to stop fermentation, followed by 1 hour in the fridge to chill until it is completely solid to forgo the overnight chill.
2. For the spiced butter, mix the soft butter with the demerara sugar, light brown sugar, salt, cardamom, and cinnamon until well combined. You don't want it to be aerated. Set aside until ready to use. You can do this in advance as long as it is soft and spreadable when you use it.
3. To assemble, roll out the dough to about 16 x 10 inches. Spread 100 grams (7 tablespoons) of the spiced butter onto the dough and perform a letter fold/single fold. Fold the dough into thirds, crossing over in the middle. Wrap and put into the freezer for 10 minutes, or the fridge for 30 minutes, to firm up.
4. Turn the dough 90 degrees, then roll out the dough to about 16 x 10 inches again and spread with the rest of the spiced butter. Perform another letter fold/single fold. The dough will be 10 x 6 inches. Lengthen the dough so it is 12 x 6 inches.
5. Turn it 90 degrees, then cut it into 1¼-inch wide pieces, 75 to 85 grams (2½ to 3 ounces). To shape, cut three strips into each piece, leaving them attached at one end with 1 inch uncut so they are still connected. Braid the strips, then roll up the dough into a bun. Place into a cupcake [muffin] pan, lightly cover, and proof for 1 hour or until puffy.
6. Preheat the oven to 400°F [200°C].
7. Gently brush the buns with egg wash and bake for 18 to 22 minutes, until golden. Let cool in the pan for 5 to 10 minutes.
8. For the soak, whisk together all the ingredients. This can be made 3 days in advance and kept in the fridge.
9. Remove the buns from the pan and place into your soaking custard—try to get them to absorb as much as possible, then place back into the pan.
10. Bake at 375°F [190°C] for 10 minutes. Remove the buns from the pan carefully using an offset spatula (sometimes they can stick) and let cool completely on a cooling rack.
11. For the icing, heat the sugar, water, and vinegar on the stovetop for 1 to 2 minutes, until it is viciously bubbling. Take off the heat and whisk in the butter, rum, and salt. Let cool and thicken slightly, about 10 minutes, then drizzle the buns with the icing. Allow to set for 5 minutes before serving.
12. The buns can be kept in the fridge for up to 3 days, then reheated at 350°F [180°C] for 10 minutes.

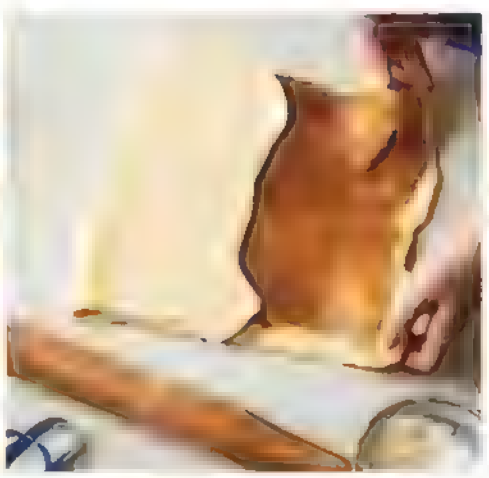
Tangzhong Bun Dough

Makes 600 grams (1 pound 5 ounces) dough, enough for about 10 buns

The tangzhong version of the classic bun dough makes use of the pre-gelatinized starch technique to sneak a bit more hydration into the recipe. This dough will be fluffier and have a better shelf life, too.

Tangzhong:
120 grams (½ cup) water
25 grams (3 tablespoons) bread flour

Dough:
35 grams (2½ tablespoons) whole milk
1 whole egg (50 grams)
245 grams (1¾ cups plus 3 tablespoons) bread flour
4 grams (1⅓ teaspoons) dry [instant] yeast



40 **grams (3 tablespoons) granulated sugar**
5 **grams (1 teaspoon) fine salt**
70 **grams (5 tablespoons) butter, softened**

1. To make the tangzhong, off the heat whisk the water and flour together.
2. Cook over medium heat, whisking/stirring all the time, until it thickens. It will be very thick. Take off the heat and move it into the bowl of a stand mixer, allowing it to cool slightly. Too hot and you risk harming the yeast, so if you can comfortably touch it, that is good.
3. In the stand mixer, first add the liquids on top of the warm tangzhong followed by the dry ingredients. Mix on medium speed for 8 to 10 minutes, until medium gluten development is reached—this is when you can pull on the dough and it stays together, but it is still quite fragile. You can take it further than this, but this is the minimum requirement before adding the butter.
4. Add the soft butter 1 teaspoon at a time with the mixer running. Mix until very smooth—6 to 8 minutes—and full gluten development is reached. This is when you can pull a thin, almost translucent layer with the dough. If you have not reached it by this stage, rest the dough for 5 minutes, then mix for another 5 minutes. Continue until full gluten development is reached.
5. Remove from the bowl and round it a few times on the work surface so it has a smooth surface. At this point, you can press it down and put it into the fridge to cold proof and shape the next day. Otherwise, move into a clean bowl, then let rest and rise for 1 hour, covered, or until puffy and doubled. Shape the dough as directed in the recipe.

Note: *The water in the tangzhong can be replaced with equal parts milk and water or all milk. This makes the buns brown a little more and become slightly more tender.*

Egg Wash

An all-purpose egg wash for pastries and bread alike. The salt helps break down the eggs to make it easier to brush on.

2 **whole eggs (100 grams)**
1 **gram (⅛ teaspoon) fine salt**

1. Whisk everything together at least 20 minutes before using so the eggs break down. This can be made 3 days in advance and kept in an airtight container in the fridge.

Bake from Scratch
Recipe Testing Notes

Lightly spray muffin cups with baking spray with flour before adding dough.

We used the dough hook attachment for mixing Tangzhong Bun Dough.

Strawberry-Almond Custard Cake,
PAGE 77

Strawberry BLISS

A beautiful sign of spring in the southern US and summer in the northern US, strawberries are a promise of the warmer temperatures and longer days of sunshine to come. Embrace their ruby hue, flowery aroma, and juicy sweetness in this bountiful batch of cakes, bars, and pie.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY
KYLE CARPENTER AND STEPHANIE WELBOURNE STEELE
RECIPE DEVELOPMENT BY
OLA AGBODZA AND AMANDA STABILE
STYLING BY
MAGGIE RATLIFF

STRAWBERRY SMARTS

Although strawberries can be found at grocery stores year-round, like any other produce, they're at their best when in season. Strawberries grown in the South are at their peak in March, April, and May. In the North, look for berries in June and July. In the West, harvest season runs from April to July.

A ripe strawberry will have a sweet, floral fragrance and be completely red—the darker the hue, the sweeter the flesh. Strawberries ripen from tip to stem, so whiteness around the stems can indicate the berries were not given the proper time to ripen on the plant. Strawberries do not ripen after being picked, so make sure they're already at your desired level of ripeness when choosing them.

One of the best indicators of freshness is the cap of the strawberry. If the leaves are bright green, the strawberries are likely fresher.

Buy locally grown when possible. Strawberries that are shipped long distances are often picked underripe to hold up during transportation, which means these berries can be bland or tart.

Small berries tend to be juicier and more flavorful than larger ones. Bigger berries often contain more water, which dilutes the taste. Though larger berries might seem like a better value and less work, smaller berries are worth the effort.

Store strawberries in the crisper drawer of the refrigerator in their clamshell container or in a partially sealed plastic bag. They'll stay fresh for about 5 days.

Don't wash strawberries or remove their caps until you're ready to eat or use them.

STRAWBERRY–WHITE CHOCOLATE BLONDIES

Makes 9 to 12 bars

The slightly caramelized flavor of the brown sugar and the vanilla richness of the white chocolate in the batter gives these bars a toasty depth of flavor while the strawberries bring big bursts of freshness in every bite.

- 1¾ cups (219 grams) all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon (5 grams) baking powder
- 1 teaspoon (3 grams) kosher salt
- ¾ cup (170 grams) unsalted butter, melted and cooled
- 1½ cups (330 grams) firmly packed light brown sugar
- 2 large eggs (100 grams), room temperature
- 1¼ teaspoons (5 grams) vanilla extract, divided
- 5 ounces (142 grams) white chocolate, chopped and divided
- ½ cup (72 grams) diced fresh strawberries
- ¼ cup (36 grams) sliced fresh strawberries
- ¾ cup (90 grams) confectioners' sugar
- 1 tablespoon (15 grams) water

1. Preheat oven to 350°F (180°C). Spray a 9-inch square baking pan with cooking spray. Line pan with parchment paper, letting excess extend over sides of pan.
2. In a medium bowl, whisk together flour, baking powder, and salt.
3. In a large bowl, whisk together melted butter and brown sugar until well combined; whisk in eggs and 1 teaspoon (4 grams) vanilla. Add flour mixture, and fold just until combined. Fold in 4 ounces (113 grams) white chocolate and diced strawberries. Spread batter into prepared pan. Top with sliced strawberries and remaining 1 ounce (29 grams) white chocolate, gently pressing into batter.
4. Bake until golden brown and a wooden pick inserted in center comes out with a few moist crumbs, 40 to 45 minutes. Let cool completely in pan on a wire rack. Using excess parchment as handles, remove from pan.
5. In a small bowl, whisk together confectioners' sugar, 1 tablespoon (15 grams) water, and remaining ¼ teaspoon (1 gram) vanilla until smooth. Cut blondie into pieces, and drizzle with glaze. Refrigerate in an airtight container for up to 3 days.

STRAWBERRY CREAM CHEESE PIE

Makes 1 (9-inch) pie

Remember the Shoney's restaurant chain? We do, too—and if they're still in your area, lucky you! Our editor-in-chief fondly recalls enjoying many slices of their signature pie when he was a child. This recipe brings back those familiar flavors to him but made even better. The blind-baked cream cheese piecrust stays sturdy, and its slight tang is a great contrast to the sweet jammy filling.

All-purpose flour, for dusting
Cream Cheese Pie Dough (recipe follows)
5 cups (720 grams) quartered hulled fresh strawberries, divided
¾ cup (150 grams) granulated sugar
1 tablespoon (15 grams) fresh lemon juice
½ teaspoon (1.5 grams) kosher salt
4½ tablespoons (36 grams) cornstarch
2 ounces (57 grams) cream cheese, softened
¼ cup (30 grams) confectioners' sugar
1 cup (240 grams) cold heavy whipping cream

1. Preheat oven to 400°F (200°C).
2. On a lightly floured surface, roll Cream Cheese Pie Dough into a ⅛-inch-thick circle (about 13 inches wide). Transfer to a 9-inch ceramic pie plate, pressing into bottom and up sides of plate. Trim excess dough to ½ inch beyond edge of plate. Fold dough edges under, and crimp as desired. Using a fork, dock bottom of dough. Freeze until firm, at least 15 minutes.
3. Top prepared crust with a piece of parchment paper. Add pie weights.
4. Bake until edges are set and lightly golden brown, about 15 minutes. Carefully remove parchment and weights, and bake until crust is dry and lightly browned, 7 to 10 minutes more. Let cool completely.
5. In a medium saucepan, bring 4 cups (576 grams) strawberries, granulated sugar, lemon juice, and salt to a boil over medium heat. Cook, stirring and mashing fruit with a spoon, until berries soften and release most of their liquid, 3 to 5 minutes.
6. Carefully transfer ¼ cup (60 grams) liquid from pan to a small bowl; add cornstarch, and whisk until smooth. Add cornstarch mixture to strawberry mixture; cook, stirring constantly, until mixture is thick and translucent, 2 to 3 minutes. Stir in remaining 1 cup (144 grams) strawberries until well combined. Pour mixture into cooled prepared crust. Refrigerate until filling is cold and completely set, at least 2 hours, or up to overnight.
7. In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the whisk attachment, beat cream cheese and confectioners' sugar at low speed until smooth and combined. With mixer on low speed, slowly add cold cream. Thoroughly scrape bottom and sides of bowl. Gradually increase mixer speed to medium-high, and beat until medium peaks form, 2 to 3 minutes. Spread onto pie. Refrigerate in an airtight container for up to 3 days.

Cream Cheese Pie Dough

Makes 1 (9-inch) crust

1½ cups (188 grams) all-purpose flour
1 tablespoon (12 grams) granulated sugar
½ teaspoon (1.5 grams) kosher salt
¼ cup (57 grams) cold unsalted butter, cubed
2 ounces (57 grams) cream cheese, cubed
¼ cup (60 grams) ice water

1. In the work bowl of a food processor, pulse flour, sugar, and salt until combined. Add cold butter and cream cheese; pulse until mixture is crumbly. Add ¼ cup (60 grams) ice water, 1 tablespoon (15 grams) at a time, pulsing just until dough comes together.
2. Turn out dough, and shape into a disk. Wrap tightly in plastic wrap, and refrigerate for at least 2 hours or up to 3 days. (Alternatively, freeze for up to 2 months. Let dough thaw overnight in refrigerator before using.)

STRAWBERRY–ALMOND CUSTARD CAKE

Makes 1 (13x9-inch) cake

Studded with fresh berries and covered with a creamy berry-infused topping, the soft, spongy layers of this cake are filled with smooth custard and brushed with an almond syrup that keeps every bite moist and fluffy.

- **6 large eggs (300 grams), room temperature**
- **1 cup plus 2 tablespoons (224 grams) granulated sugar**
- **1 teaspoon (4 grams) almond extract**
- **1 teaspoon (4 grams) vanilla extract**
- **1½ cups (188 grams) all-purpose flour**
- **1½ teaspoons (7.5 grams) baking powder**
- **¾ teaspoon (2.25 grams) kosher salt**
- **½ cup plus 1 tablespoon sour cream (135 grams), room temperature**
- **6 tablespoons (84 grams) vegetable oil**
- **Almond Simple Syrup (recipe follows)**
- **Pastry Cream (recipe follows)**
- **1 pound (454 grams) fresh strawberries, chopped**
- **Roasted Strawberry Mascarpone Whipped Cream (recipe follows)**
- **Garnish: candied sliced almonds (see Note)**

1. Preheat oven to 350°F (180°C). Line a 13x9-inch baking pan with parchment paper, letting excess extend over sides of pan; lightly brush only bottom of parchment paper with baking spray with flour.
2. In the heatproof bowl of a stand mixer, whisk together eggs and sugar by hand. Place bowl over a saucepan of simmering water. Cook, whisking constantly, until an instant-read thermometer registers 110°F (43°C).
3. Carefully return bowl to stand mixer; add extracts. Using the whisk attachment, beat at high speed until thick, tripled in volume, and ribbon-consistency, 3 to 4 minutes.
4. In a medium bowl, sift together flour, baking powder, and salt. Using a large balloon whisk, gently fold flour mixture into egg mixture in two additions just until combined.
5. In a small bowl, whisk together sour cream and oil. Transfer 1 cup (112 grams) batter to a small bowl, and whisk in sour cream mixture until combined. Fold sour cream mixture into batter in two additions just until combined. Spread batter into prepared pan with an offset spatula, using as few strokes as possible.
6. Bake until top springs back when gently touched and a wooden pick inserted in center comes out clean, about 30 minutes. Let cool completely in pan on a wire rack.
7. Run a knife around edges of pan to loosen cake. Using excess parchment as handles, remove cake from pan, and transfer to a large cutting board. Using a long serrated knife, cut cake in half horizontally. Using a cake lifter or cake board, gently separate layers.
8. Using a cake lifter or cake board, return bottom half of cake, cut side up, to baking pan. Using a pastry brush, generously brush Almond Simple Syrup onto cake. Spread Pastry Cream onto cake. Top with strawberries, gently pressing into cream.
9. Place top half of cake, cut side down, on strawberries. Generously brush with Almond Simple Syrup. Cover with plastic wrap, and refrigerate for at least 4 hours or up to overnight.
10. Just before serving, spread Roasted Strawberry Mascarpone Whipped Cream onto cake. Garnish with candied almonds, if desired. Cover and refrigerate for up to 3 days.

Note: *We garnished this cake with the same crunchy candied almonds that we used on our Burnt Almond Torte from our May/June 2024 issue. Find the recipe at* bakefromscratch.com.

Almond Simple Syrup

Makes about ⅔ cup

- **½ cup (120 grams) water**
- **¼ cup (50 grams) granulated sugar**
- **2 teaspoons (8 grams) almond extract**

1. In a small saucepan, bring ½ cup (120 grams) water and sugar to a boil over medium-high heat, stirring occasionally until sugar dissolves. Remove from heat; stir in almond extract. Let cool completely before using.

Pastry Cream

Makes about 3⅓ cups

- **3 cups (720 grams) whole milk**
- **1 cup (200 grams) granulated sugar, divided**
- **8 large egg yolks (149 grams)**
- **7 tablespoons (56 grams) cornstarch**
- **1 teaspoon (3 grams) kosher salt**
- **2 tablespoons (28 grams) unsalted butter, softened**
- **2 teaspoons (12 grams) vanilla bean paste**

1. In a large saucepan, heat milk and ½ cup (100 grams) sugar over medium heat, whisking frequently, until steaming. (Do not boil.)
2. In a large bowl, whisk together egg yolks, cornstarch, salt, and remaining ½ cup (100 grams) sugar until smooth. Gradually add warm milk mixture, whisking constantly. Pour mixture into saucepan; cook over medium heat, whisking constantly, until thickened and bubbly, 4 to 5 minutes.
3. Strain mixture through a fine-mesh sieve into a large bowl, discarding solids. Whisk in butter in two additions until melted and smooth; whisk in vanilla bean paste. Cover with plastic wrap, pressing wrap directly on surface of pastry cream to prevent a skin from forming. Refrigerate until thick and cold, at least 4 hours, or overnight.

Roasted Strawberry Mascarpone Whipped Cream

Makes 4½ cups

- **1 pound (454 grams) fresh strawberries, hulled and quartered**
- **2 tablespoons (48 grams) granulated sugar**
- **¼ teaspoon kosher salt**
- **1 cup (225 grams) mascarpone cheese*, softened**
- **1 cup (120 grams) confectioners' sugar**
- **½ teaspoon (2 grams) vanilla extract**
- **1 cup (240 grams) cold heavy whipping cream**

1. Preheat oven to 375°F (190°C).
2. In a 13x9-inch baking dish, stir together strawberries, granulated sugar, and salt until well combined.

3. Bake until berries are soft and fragrant and have released ample liquid, about 30 minutes, stirring every 10 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, remove berries from pan, and finely chop. Reserve berry liquid.
4. In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the whisk attachment, beat chopped roasted strawberries, reserved berry liquid, mascarpone, confectioners' sugar, and vanilla at medium speed until well combined, 1 to 2 minutes. With mixer on medium speed, add cold cream in a slow, steady stream, beating until well combined. Scrape bottom and sides of bowl and whisk. Beat at high speed until stiff peaks form, 1 to 2 minutes. Use immediately.

**We used BelGioioso® Mascarpone Cheese.*

STRAWBERRY–PISTACHIO LAYER CAKE

Makes 1 (8-inch) cake

This luscious cake is a stunning celebration of flavor and elegance, perfect for special occasions. Each layer of moist pistachio cake is infused with a delicate nuttiness, beautifully complemented by fresh strawberries and a light, creamy frosting. The combination of vibrant colors and contrasting textures makes this cake as visually appealing as it is delicious.

- ¾ cup (170 grams) unsalted butter, softened
- 2 cups (400 grams) granulated sugar
- 2 large eggs (100 grams), room temperature
- 2 large egg whites (60 grams), room temperature
- 3 cups (375 grams) all-purpose flour
- 1½ cups (213 grams) unsalted toasted pistachios, finely ground
- 1¾ teaspoons (5.25 grams) kosher salt
- 1½ teaspoons (7.5 grams) baking powder
- 1 cup (240 grams) whole buttermilk
- 1 teaspoon (4 grams) vanilla extract
- ½ teaspoon (2 grams) almond extract
- 1 to 2 drops green gel food coloring (optional)
- Roasted Strawberry Swiss Meringue Buttercream (recipe follows)
- ½ cup (155 grams) Roasted Strawberry Jam (recipe follows)
- Garnish: halved fresh strawberries, chopped toasted pistachios

1. Preheat oven to 350°F (180°C). Spray 3 (8-inch) round cake pans with baking spray with flour. Line bottom of pans with parchment paper.

2. In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, beat butter and sugar at medium speed until fluffy, 3 to 4 minutes, stopping to scrape sides of bowl.

Find this cake stand at *bakefromscratch.com/shoptheissue.*

Add eggs and egg whites, one at a time, beating well after each addition.
3. In a medium bowl, whisk together flour, ground pistachios, salt, and baking powder. In a small bowl, whisk together buttermilk, extracts, and food coloring (if using). With mixer on low speed, gradually add flour mixture to butter mixture alternately with buttermilk mixture, beginning and ending with flour mixture, beating just until combined after each addition. Divide batter among prepared pans (about 519 grams each), and spread smooth with a small offset spatula.
4. Bake until a wooden pick inserted in center comes out clean, about 30 minutes. Let cool in pans for 10 minutes. Remove from pans, and let cool completely on wire racks.
5. Spread a thin layer of Roasted Strawberry Swiss Meringue Buttercream on 1 cooled cake layer (about ¼ cup or 42 grams). Place 2 cups buttercream in a pastry bag fitted with a medium round piping tip. Pipe a ½-inch-thick border of buttercream around edge of cake layer. Spread half of Roasted Strawberry Jam within border. Top with second cake layer. Spread a thin layer of buttercream on cake layer; pipe a ½-inch-thick border of buttercream around edge of cake layer. Spread remaining Roasted Strawberry Jam within border. Top with remaining cake layer. Spread a thin layer of buttercream on top and sides of cake. Freeze for 30 minutes.
6. Spread remaining Roasted Strawberry Swiss Meringue Buttercream on top and sides of cake. Garnish with strawberries and chopped pistachios, if desired. Refrigerate in an airtight container for up to 3 days.

Roasted Strawberry Swiss Meringue Buttercream

Makes about 8 cups

- **8 large egg whites (240 grams)**
- **2 cups (400 grams) granulated sugar**
- **1 teaspoon (3 grams) kosher salt**
- **⅛ teaspoon cream of tartar**
- **2 cups (454 grams) unsalted butter, softened**
- **1 teaspoon (4 grams) vanilla extract**
- **½ cup (155 grams) Roasted Strawberry Jam (recipe follows)**
- **1 to 2 drops red gel food coloring (optional)**

1. In the heatproof bowl of a stand mixer, whisk together egg whites, sugar, salt, and cream of tartar by hand. Place bowl over a saucepan of simmering water. Cook, whisking constantly, until sugar dissolves and an instant-read thermometer registers 160°F (71°C).
2. Carefully return bowl to stand mixer. Using the whisk attachment, beat at high speed until stiff peaks form and meringue is just warm to the touch, about 10 minutes. Add butter, about 2 tablespoons (28 grams) at a time, beating until combined after each addition. (If buttercream breaks or looks loose, beat for 2 to 3 minutes, and the emulsion will come back together.) Beat in vanilla.
3. With mixer on medium speed, add Roasted Strawberry Jam, 1 tablespoon (19 grams) at a time, beating until well combined. Beat in food coloring (if using).

Use immediately, or refrigerate in an airtight container for up to 3 days. If refrigerating, let come to room temperature and re-whip before using.

Roasted Strawberry Jam

Makes about 1½ cups

- **2 pounds (907 grams) fresh strawberries, hulled and quartered**
- **1¼ cups (250 grams) granulated sugar, divided**
- **¼ teaspoon kosher salt**
- **2 tablespoons (30 grams) fresh lemon juice**

1. Preheat oven to 400°F (200°C).
2. In a 13x9-inch baking dish, stir together strawberries, ¼ cup (50 grams) sugar, and salt until well combined.
3. Bake until berries are soft and fragrant and have released ample liquid, about 30 minutes, stirring every 10 minutes.
4. Transfer berries and juices to a medium heavy-bottomed saucepan; stir in lemon juice and remaining 1 cup (200 grams) sugar. Cook over medium heat, stirring frequently, until berries are cooked down and liquid becomes thick and syrupy, 15 to 20 minutes.
5. Transfer mixture to the container of a blender, and blend until smooth. Transfer to a heatproof bowl, and let cool completely. Refrigerate in an airtight container for up to 2 weeks.

STRAWBERRY–LIME–COCONUT LAMINGTONS

Makes 12 lamingtons

Hailing from Australia, lamingtons are a layered sponge cake dipped in sauce (usually chocolate) and covered with desiccated coconut. Our version is a springtime twist on the popular dessert. With lime-infused cake layers and a sweet strawberry glaze, these lamingtons are an elegant indulgence you won't want to miss.

- **1 cup (227 grams) unsalted butter, softened**
- **1½ cups (300 grams) granulated sugar**
- **1 tablespoon (6 grams) lime zest**
- **4 large eggs (200 grams), separated**
- **1 teaspoon (4 grams) vanilla extract**
- **¾ teaspoon (3 grams) coconut extract**
- **2½ cups (313 grams) cake flour**
- **1½ teaspoons (7.5 grams) baking powder**
- **1 teaspoon (3 grams) kosher salt**
- **¼ teaspoon (1.25 grams) baking soda**
- **1¼ cups (300 grams) unsweetened coconut milk**
- **3 tablespoons (45 grams) fresh lime juice**
- **⅓ cup (107 grams) strawberry preserves**
- **Strawberry Glaze (recipe follows)**
- **Unsweetened flaked (dessicated) coconut, for coating**

1. Preheat oven to 350°F (180°C). Spray a 13x9-inch baking dish with baking spray with flour.
2. In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, beat butter, sugar, and lime zest at medium speed until fluffy, 3 to 4 minutes, stopping to scrape sides of bowl. Add egg yolks, one at a time, beating well after each addition. Beat in extracts.
3. In a medium bowl, whisk together flour, baking powder, salt, and baking soda. In a small bowl, combine coconut milk and lime juice. With mixer on low speed, gradually add flour mixture to butter mixture alternately with coconut milk mixture, beginning and ending with flour mixture, beating just until combined after each addition. Transfer batter to a large bowl.
4. Clean bowl of stand mixer. Using the whisk attachment, beat egg whites at high speed just until stiff peaks form. Gently fold egg whites into batter in three additions until well combined. Pour batter into prepared pan, smoothing top if necessary.
5. Bake until a wooden pick inserted in center comes out clean, about 30 minutes. Let cool completely in pan on a wire rack.
6. Transfer cake to a large cutting board. Using a long serrated knife, level cake to about 1 inch tall. With one long side closest to you, cut cake into 2 (8¼x6-inch) rectangles. Spread preserves onto 1 rectangle; top with remaining rectangle. Gently cut cake into 12 (2-inch) squares.
7. Place a wire rack on a rimmed baking sheet, and place cake squares 1 to 2 inches apart on wire rack. Freeze until firm, 45 minutes to 1 hour.
8. Transfer Strawberry Glaze to a tall, narrow (no more than 3 inches wide) container. Working with 1 cake square at a time, using a wooden skewer, pick up each cake square, and dip into glaze until fully covered, letting excess drip back into container. Return to wire rack, and let stand until completely set, about 30 minutes.
9. Pour flaked coconut onto a small baking sheet. Using a spatula or wooden skewer, roll each cake square in coconut. Place on desired serving dish, and let come to room temperature, 1 to 2 hours. Refrigerate in an airtight container for up to 3 days.

Strawberry Glaze

Makes about 2⅓ cups

- **1 pound (454 grams) fresh strawberries, hulled and halved**
- **1 cup (200 grams) granulated sugar**
- **½ cup (120 grams) full-fat coconut milk**
- **¼ cup (85 grams) light corn syrup**
- **¼ cup plus 1 tablespoon (75 grams) water**
- **2 (0.25-ounce) envelopes (14 grams) unflavored gelatin**
- **1 to 2 drops red gel food coloring (optional)**

1. In the container of a blender, purée strawberries until smooth. (It should make about 1¾ cups or 410 grams purée.) Transfer strawberry purée to a medium saucepan, and add sugar, coconut milk, and corn syrup. Cook over medium-high heat, stirring occasionally, until mixture comes to a boil and an instant-read thermometer registers 214°F (101°C) to 218°F (103°C), 25 to 30 minutes.
2. Meanwhile, in a small bowl, place ¼ cup plus 1 tablespoon (75 grams) water; sprinkle gelatin on top. Let stand for 5 to 10 minutes.
3. Remove strawberry mixture from heat; stir in gelatin mixture and food coloring (if using) until gelatin dissolves. Strain mixture through a fine-mesh sieve into a heatproof bowl, and let cool, stirring occasionally, until an instant-read thermometer registers 85°F (29°C) to 90°F (32°C). Use immediately.

STRAWBERRY-PRETZEL BARS

Makes 9 to 12 bars

If you're not from the Southern or Midwestern US, you might not have ever heard of strawberry-pretzel salad, which is the inspiration for these bars. While "salad" is part of the name, fear not—no vegetables or savory dressings are involved. Traditional strawberry-pretzel salad is comprised of a pretzel (and sometimes nut) crust, a sweet cream cheese layer, and a strawberry gelatin topping. Our version features a slightly caramelly sweet-salty crust, a fluffy citrus-infused filling, and fresh berry topping.

Crust:

- 1½ cups (210 grams) very finely crushed pretzels
- ½ cup (113 grams) unsalted butter, melted
- ⅓ cup plus 1 tablespoon (73 grams) firmly packed light brown sugar
- 3 tablespoons (24 grams) all-purpose flour

Sauce:

- 2 cups (340 grams) chopped fresh strawberries
- ¼ cup (50 grams) granulated sugar
- 2 teaspoons (4 grams) lemon zest
- 1 tablespoon (15 grams) cold water
- 1½ teaspoons (4.5 grams) cornstarch

Filling:

- 2 (8-ounce) packages (453 grams) cream cheese, softened
- 1½ cups (180 grams) confectioners' sugar
- 2 teaspoon (2 grams) lemon zest
- 1 teaspoon (4 grams) vanilla extract
- 2 cups (480 grams) cold heavy whipping cream
- 1 to 2 drops red gel food coloring (optional)

- ½ pound (226 grams) fresh strawberries, thinly sliced

1. Preheat oven to 350°F (180°F). Line a 9-inch square baking pan with foil, letting excess extend over sides of pan. Lightly spray foil with baking spray with flour.
2. For crust: In a medium bowl, whisk together all ingredients until well combined. Firmly press mixture into bottom of prepared pan.
3. Bake until set, 15 to 20 minutes. Let cool completely on a wire rack. Freeze crust until cold.
4. Meanwhile, for sauce: In a medium nonreactive saucepan, bring strawberries, granulated sugar, and lemon zest to a boil over medium-high heat, stirring occasionally until sugar dissolves. Using a potato masher, mash berries into small pieces. Cook, stirring frequently, until slightly thickened, 10 to 15 minutes.
5. In a small bowl, whisk together 1 tablespoon (15 grams) cold water and cornstarch until smooth; whisk into strawberry mixture. Reduce heat to medium; cook, whisking constantly, until thickened, 2 to 4 minutes. Press mixture through a fine-mesh sieve, discarding solids. Let cool completely.
6. For filling: In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, beat cream cheese at medium speed until smooth, about 1 minute. Add confectioners' sugar, lemon zest, and vanilla; beat at medium-low speed until smooth, stopping to scrape bottom and sides of bowl. Gradually add cold cream, beating until combined. Thoroughly scrape bottom and sides of bowl. Gradually increase mixer speed to high, and beat until stiff peaks form, 1 to 2 minutes.
7. Spread one-third of filling (about 368 grams) onto cold prepared crust.
8. Add cooled sauce and food coloring (if using) to remaining filling; beat at low speed just until combined. Gently spread onto filling in pan. Cover with plastic wrap, ensuring plastic does not touch filling. Refrigerate until cold and set, at least 6 hours, or up to overnight.
9. Using excess foil as handles, remove from pan, and top with sliced strawberries just before serving. Refrigerate in an airtight container for up to 3 days.

STIR -AND- BAKE CAKES

These sophisticated cakes require little more equipment—and little more effort—than a few whisks, spoons, and bowls to simply stir together a batter and bake up a beauty

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOHN O'HAGAN
RECIPE DEVELOPMENT BY OLA AGBODZA
FOOD STYLING BY KATIE MOON DICKERSON

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LEMON MERINGUE CAKE

Makes 1 (6-cup) cake

This cake is a twist on the classic pie, marrying the bright flavor of lemon with the sweet, fluffy texture of meringue. The soft, moist cake holds a punchy Lemon Curd that's topped with a lightly browned meringue with a caramelly, toasty flavor and lovely golden color.

Cake:

- 1 cup (200 grams) granulated sugar
- ⅓ cup (76 grams) unsalted butter, melted
- ¼ cup (56 grams) neutral oil
- 2 teaspoons (4 grams) lemon zest
- 3 large eggs (150 grams), room temperature
- 1¼ cups (156 grams) all-purpose flour
- 2 teaspoons (10 grams) baking powder
- ¾ teaspoon (2.25 grams) kosher salt
- ½ cup (120 grams) sour cream, room temperature
- 1 teaspoon (4 grams) vanilla extract

Lemon Curd (recipe follows)

Meringue:

- ½ cup (100 grams) granulated sugar
- 2 large egg whites (60 grams)

1. Preheat oven to 350°F (180°C).
2. For cake: In a medium bowl, whisk together sugar, melted butter, oil, and lemon zest until fluffy, 1 to 2 minutes. Add eggs, one at a time, whisking well after each addition.
3. In another medium bowl, whisk together flour, baking powder, and salt. In a small bowl, whisk together sour cream and vanilla. Gradually add flour mixture to butter mixture alternately with sour cream mixture, beginning and ending with flour mixture, whisking just until combined after each addition.
4. Spray a 6-cup charlotte cake pan with baking spray with flour. Using a pastry brush, spread any excess spray in pan, blotting brush with a paper towel as needed. Spread batter into prepared pan. Tap pan on a kitchen towel-lined counter several times to settle batter and release any air bubbles.
5. Bake until golden and a wooden pick inserted in center comes out clean, 30 to 35 minutes. Let cool in pan for 10 minutes. Invert cake onto a wire rack, and let cool completely.
6. Transfer cooled cake to a serving plate. Spread Lemon Curd onto cake.
7. For meringue: In the heatproof bowl of a stand mixer, whisk together sugar and egg whites by hand. Place bowl over a saucepan of simmering water. Cook, whisking frequently, until sugar completely dissolves and an instant-read thermometer registers 120°F (49°C) to 130°F (54°C).
8. Carefully return bowl to stand mixer. Using the whisk attachment, beat at high speed until stiff peaks form and bowl is cool to the touch, 2 to 3 minutes.
9. Spoon topping into a large pastry bag fitted with a ½-inch French star piping tip (Ateco #868). Pipe meringue onto cake as desired. Using a handheld kitchen torch, carefully brown meringue as desired. Best served same day as made. Refrigerate in an airtight container for up to 3 days.

Lemon Curd

Makes about 1½ cups

- ¾ cup plus 1 tablespoon (162 grams) granulated sugar
- 3 tablespoons (24 grams) cornstarch
- 4 large egg yolks (74 grams), room temperature
- 1 large egg (50 grams), room temperature
- 2 teaspoons (4 grams) packed lemon zest
- ½ cup (120 grams) fresh lemon juice
- 5 tablespoons (75 grams) water
- ¾ teaspoon (2.25 grams) kosher salt
- ¼ cup (57 grams) unsalted butter, cubed and softened

1. In a medium saucepan, whisk together sugar and cornstarch. Add egg yolks and egg; whisk until smooth. Whisk in lemon zest and juice, 5 tablespoons (75 grams) water, and salt until smooth. Cook over medium-low heat, whisking constantly, until mixture is thickened and bubbly, about 7 minutes.
2. Remove from heat, and strain through a fine-mesh sieve into a heatproof bowl. Add butter, and stir until completely incorporated. Cover with plastic wrap, pressing wrap directly onto surface of curd to prevent a skin from forming. Refrigerate until completely cooled, at least 1 hour.

COCONUT TRES LECHES CAKE

Makes 1 (13x9-inch) cake

Coconut lovers, meet your new favorite cake! We infused the traditional Latin American dessert with a quartet of coconut so each bite is a velvety, melt-in-your-mouth experience with tropical flair.

- 1¾ cups (219 grams) cake flour
- 1 cup (200 grams) granulated sugar
- ½ cup (113 grams) unsalted butter, room temperature
- ½ cup (112 grams) virgin coconut oil, melted and cooled
- 4 large eggs (200 grams), room temperature
- 2½ teaspoons (12.5 grams) baking powder
- 2 teaspoons (8 grams) vanilla extract
- 1¼ teaspoons (3.75 grams) kosher salt
- 1½ cups (360 grams) well-shaken full-fat canned coconut milk
- 1 cup (240 grams) cream of coconut
- 1 cup (240 grams) heavy whipping cream

Vanilla Whipped Cream (recipe follows)

Garnish: toasted sweetened flaked coconut

1. Preheat oven to 350°F (180°C). Using a pastry brush, lightly brush bottom of a 13x9-inch baking pan with baking spray with flour. (Do not brush sides of pan.)
2. In a large bowl, vigorously whisk together flour, sugar, butter, coconut oil, eggs, baking powder, vanilla, and salt until well combined, about 5 minutes. Spread batter into prepared pan. Tap pan on a kitchen towel-lined counter several times to release any air bubbles.
3. Bake until golden brown and a wooden pick inserted in center comes out clean, about 20 minutes. Let cool in pan on a wire rack for 30 minutes. Run a sharp knife around edges of pan to loosen cake.
4. In a liquid-measuring cup, whisk together coconut milk, cream of coconut, and cream until well combined.
5. Using a small wooden skewer, poke holes all over warm cake. Slowly pour coconut mixture all over cake. Let cool completely. Cover and refrigerate cooled cake for at least 4 hours or up to overnight.

6. Just before serving, spread Vanilla Whipped Cream onto cake, and garnish with flaked coconut, if desired. Cover and refrigerate for up to 3 days.

PRO TIP: *Cream of coconut is a sweetened version of coconut cream, which is a combination of coconut water and coconut meat. Cream of coconut is often used in cocktails, so you're likely to find it in the wine, beer, and mixers section of your grocery store.*

Vanilla Whipped Cream

Makes about 5 cups

- **2 cups (480 grams) cold heavy whipping cream**
- **⅔ cup (80 grams) confectioners' sugar**
- **1 teaspoon (4 grams) vanilla extract**

1. In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the whisk attachment, beat all ingredients at low speed until well combined. Increase mixer speed to medium-high, and beat until medium peaks form, 2 to 3 minutes.

PEANUT BUTTER AND HONEY CAKE

Makes 1 (9-inch) cake

This cake pays homage to peanut butter and honey sandwiches, a combo just as delicious as PB&J. Topped with a creamy honey frosting and crunchy honey-roasted peanuts, it's a treat to make the everyday feel extra special.

- **1¾ cups (219 grams) all-purpose flour**
- **2 teaspoons (10 grams) baking powder**
- **1 teaspoon (3 grams) kosher salt**
- **½ teaspoon (2.5 grams) baking soda**
- **¾ cup (165 grams) firmly packed light brown sugar**
- **½ cup (128 grams) creamy peanut butter**
- **6 tablespoons (84 grams) neutral oil**
- **3 tablespoons (63 grams) honey**
- **2 large eggs (100 grams), room temperature**
- **1½ teaspoons (6 grams) vanilla extract**
- **1 cup (240 grams) whole buttermilk, room temperature**
- **Honey Buttercream (recipe follows)**
- **Garnish: honey, chopped honey-roasted peanuts**

1. Preheat oven to 325°F (170°C). Spray a 9-inch round cake pan with baking spray with flour. Line bottom of pan with parchment paper.
2. In a medium bowl, whisk together flour, baking powder, salt, and baking soda.
3. In a large bowl, whisk together brown sugar, peanut butter, oil, and honey until combined and creamy, about 2 minutes. Add eggs, one at a time, whisking until well combined after each addition. Whisk in vanilla.
4. Add flour mixture to sugar mixture alternately with buttermilk, beginning and ending with flour mixture, whisking just until combined after each addition. Spread batter into prepared pan.
5. Bake until a wooden pick inserted in center comes out clean, 50 to 55 minutes. Let cool in pan for 10 minutes. Remove from pan, and let cool completely on a wire rack.
6. Spread Honey Buttercream onto cooled cake. Garnish with honey and peanuts, if desired. Refrigerate in an airtight container for up to 3 days.

Honey Buttercream

Makes about 2 cups

- **½ cup (113 grams) unsalted butter, softened**
- **½ cup (113 grams) cream cheese, softened**
- **1 teaspoon (4 grams) vanilla extract**
- **1 tablespoon (21 grams) honey**
- **2 cups (240 grams) confectioners' sugar**
- **⅛ teaspoon kosher salt**

1. In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, beat butter, cream cheese, and vanilla at medium speed until smooth and creamy, stopping to scrape bottom and sides of bowl. Add honey, beating until combined. Gradually add confectioners' sugar and salt, beating until smooth and well combined, stopping to scrape bottom and sides of bowl and paddle. Use immediately.

Find the charlotte cake pan for this recipe at *bakefromscratch.com/shop.*

Lemon Meringue Cake,
PAGE 89

Peanut Butter
and Honey Cake,
PAGE 90

CARROT LOAF CAKE

Makes 1 (8½x4½-inch) cake

We turned this classic layer cake into a simple loaf that's quick and comforting. Forgoing nuts, raisins, and any of the other usual mix-ins keeps the fresh carrot, fragrant spice, and tangy frosting flavors front and center.

Cake:

- 1¾ cups (219 grams) all-purpose flour
- 1 cup (200 grams) granulated sugar
- ½ cup (110 grams) firmly packed light brown sugar
- 2 teaspoons (7.5 grams) baking powder
- 2 teaspoons (4 grams) ground cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon (3 grams) kosher salt
- ¾ teaspoon (1.5 grams) ground ginger
- ¼ teaspoon (1.25 grams) baking soda
- ¼ teaspoon ground nutmeg
- 3 large eggs (150 grams), room temperature
- ⅔ cup (149 grams) neutral oil
- ⅓ cup (80 grams) whole buttermilk, room temperature
- 1 tablespoon (13 grams) vanilla extract
- 2 cups (200 grams) lightly packed shredded carrots

Frosting:

- 4 ounces (113 grams) cream cheese, softened
- ¼ cup (57 grams) unsalted butter, softened
- ½ teaspoon (2 grams) vanilla extract
- ⅛ teaspoon kosher salt
- 2½ cups (300 grams) confectioners' sugar

Garnish: ground cinnamon

1. Preheat oven to 350°F (180°C). Spray an 8½x4½-inch loaf pan with baking spray with flour. Line pan with parchment paper, letting excess extend over all sides of pan.
2. For cake: In a large bowl, whisk together flour, granulated sugar, brown sugar, baking powder, cinnamon, salt, ginger, baking soda, and nutmeg.
3. In a medium bowl, whisk together eggs, oil, buttermilk, and vanilla. Add oil mixture to flour mixture, whisking just until combined. Fold in carrots. Pour batter into prepared pan.

4. Bake until a wooden pick inserted in center comes out clean, 1 hour and 10 minutes to 1 hour and 15 minutes. Let cool in pan for 10 minutes. Using excess parchment as handles, remove from pan, and let cool completely on a wire rack.
5. For frosting: In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, beat cream cheese and butter at medium speed until creamy, 1 to 2 minutes. Beat in vanilla and salt. Gradually add confectioners' sugar, beating until smooth. Beat at high speed until light and fluffy, 1 to 2 minutes.
6. Spoon frosting into a pastry bag fitted with a large St. Honoré piping tip (Ateco #882); pipe onto cooled cake. Garnish with cinnamon, if desired. Refrigerate in an airtight container for up to 3 days.

BERRY AND MASCARPONE CHANTILLY LAYER CAKE

Makes 1 (8-inch) cake

With its delicate taste and melt-in-your-mouth texture, this cake is decadent and refined, plus quick and easy to prepare. A vanilla syrup adds extra flavor and moisture before layering with mascarpone chantilly—sweetened and flavored whipped cream—and fresh berries.

- **3½ cups (438 grams) all-purpose flour**
- **1 tablespoon (15 grams) baking powder**
- **1 teaspoon (3 grams) kosher salt**
- **1¾ cups (350 grams) granulated sugar**
- **1 cup (224 grams) neutral oil**
- **3 large eggs (150 grams), room temperature**
- **1 tablespoon (13 grams) vanilla extract**
- **1½ cups (360 grams) sour cream, room temperature**
- **Vanilla Simple Syrup (recipe follows)**
- **Mascarpone Whipped Cream (recipe follows)**
- **3 to 3½ cups (about 520 grams) assorted fresh berries, sliced and chopped as needed (see Note)**

1. Preheat oven to 350°F (180°C). Spray 2 (8-inch) round cake pans with baking spray with flour. Line bottom of pans with parchment paper.
2. In a large bowl, whisk together flour, baking powder, and salt. In another large bowl, whisk together sugar, oil, eggs, and vanilla until smooth; whisk in sour cream.
3. Gradually add flour mixture to sugar mixture, whisking just until no dry streaks remain. Divide batter between prepared pans (about 2¾ cups or 765 grams each), spreading smooth.
4. Bake until top is golden and a wooden pick inserted in center comes out clean, 35 to 40 minutes. Let cool in pans for 10 minutes. Remove from pans, and let cool completely on wire racks.
5. Level cooled cake layers, if desired. Place 1 cake layer on a serving plate. Using a pastry brush, brush half of Vanilla Simple Syrup onto cake layer. Spread 2 cups (300 grams) Mascarpone Whipped Cream onto cake layer. Top with about two-thirds (about 300 grams) berries, sliced and chopped as needed, pressing berries into filling. Top with remaining cake layer, and brush remaining vanilla syrup onto layer. Spread remaining Mascarpone Whipped Cream on top and sides of cake. Refrigerate cake for at least 30 minutes before serving. Top with remaining berries just before serving. Refrigerate in an airtight container for up to 3 days.

Note: *We used strawberries, raspberries, blueberries, and blackberries, but you can use any combination of berries or any single berry you like. Halve, slice, or chop large berries as needed before assembling layers in step 5.*

Vanilla Simple Syrup

Makes about ⅓ cup

- **¼ cup (50 grams) granulated sugar**
- **¼ cup (60 grams) water**
- **1 teaspoon (4 grams) vanilla extract**

1. In a small saucepan, bring sugar and ¼ cup (60 grams) water to a boil over medium heat, stirring occasionally until sugar dissolves. Remove from heat, stir in vanilla, and let cool completely.

Mascarpone Whipped Cream

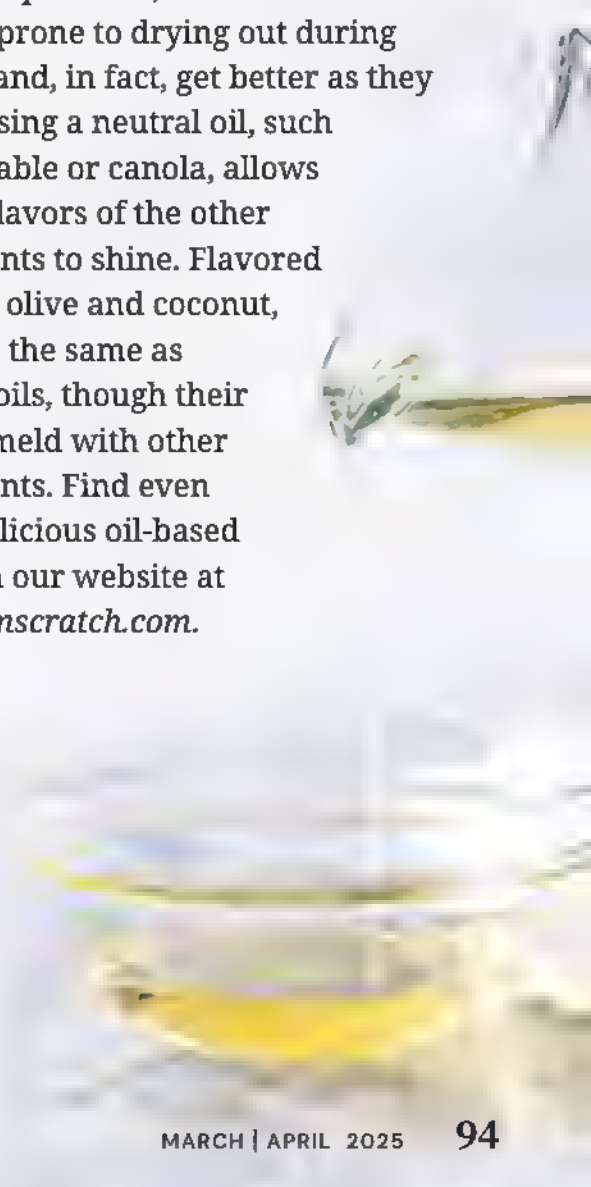
Makes about 7 cups

- **2 cups (454 grams) mascarpone cheese, softened**
- **1 cup (120 grams) confectioners' sugar**
- **1 tablespoon (18 grams) vanilla bean paste**
- **⅛ teaspoon kosher salt**
- **2 cups (480 grams) cold heavy whipping cream**

1. In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the whisk attachment, beat mascarpone, confectioners' sugar, vanilla bean paste, and salt at medium speed until smooth and combined, 1 to 2 minutes. With mixer on medium-low speed, gradually add cold cream; scrape sides of bowl. Gradually increase mixer speed to medium, and beat until very thick and fluffy, 3 to 4 minutes. Use immediately.

OIL: THE STIR-AND-BAKE CAKE'S BEST FRIEND

As well as not requiring any special equipment or appliances to create the cakes themselves, these cake batters are all oil-based. Oil cakes are known for their moist, tender, and fluffy crumb as compared to butter-based cakes. Since oil doesn't solidify at room temperature, oil-based cakes are less prone to drying out during storage and, in fact, get better as they stand. Using a neutral oil, such as vegetable or canola, allows for the flavors of the other ingredients to shine. Flavored oils, like olive and coconut, perform the same as neutral oils, though their flavors meld with other ingredients. Find even more delicious oil-based cakes on our website at *bakefromscratch.com*.



the SWEET SOUL of NEW ORLEANS

A journey through its bakeries and the innovators shaping the scene

TEXT AND RECIPE DEVELOPMENT BY
AMBER WILSON

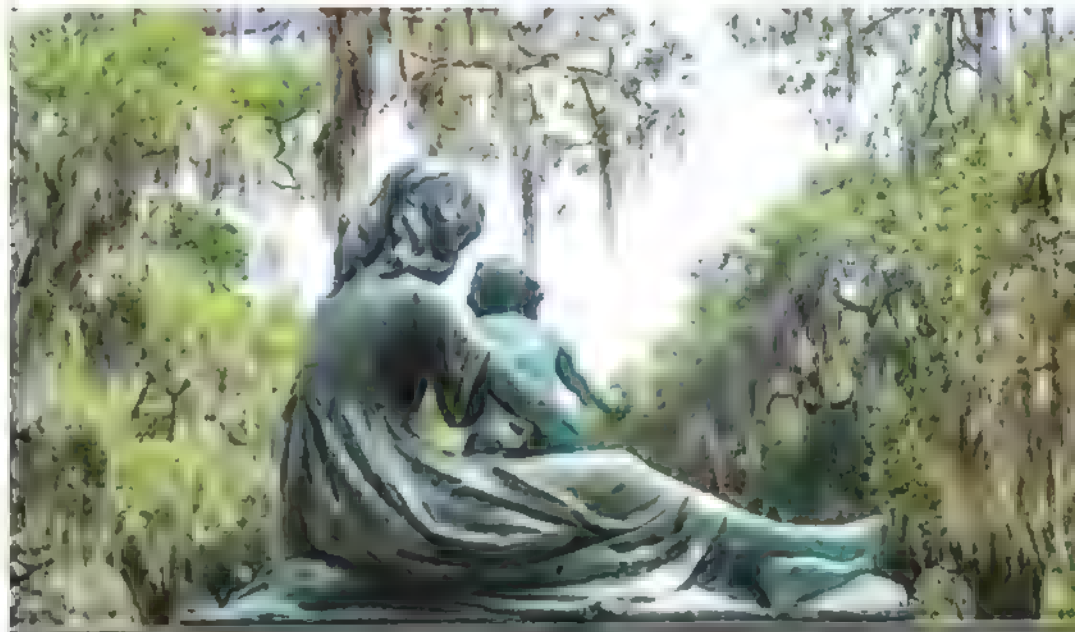
In the bustling streets of New Orleans, Louisiana, the air is filled with the sounds of jazz and the intoxicating aromas of gumbo, crawfish, and beignets. But beneath this city's iconic flavors is a whole new wave of creativity wafting from its bakeries. The vibrant, diverse food culture of New Orleans is now also shaping a fresh baking landscape, where global influences meld with local traditions and innovative flavors push past the expected. Whether you're starting your day with a perfectly crafted croissant or savoring a bite of seasonal king cake, New Orleans is proving itself as a new epicenter of outstanding baking.

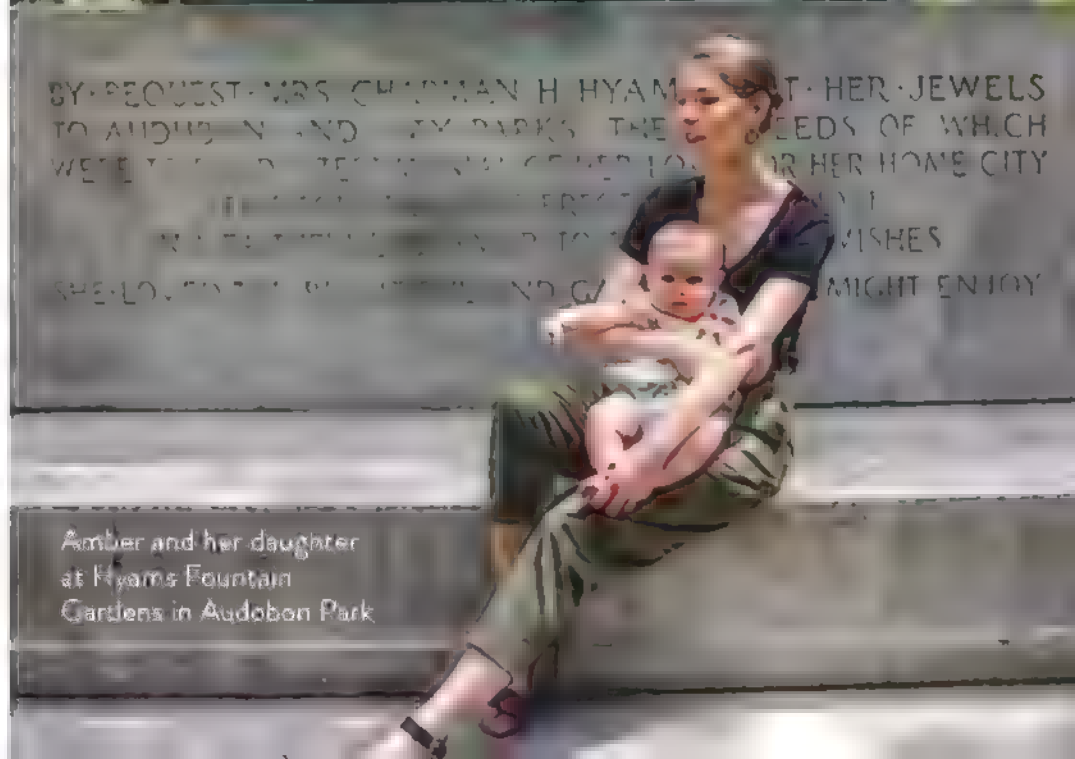
For me, New Orleans is a place of unexpected wonder. When my family moved to the city from Nashville, Tennessee, in early fall 2021, just as COVID-19 restrictions were starting to lift, I was searching for a sense of belonging after navigating years of personal loss and isolation. But this vibrant city, where life happens in the most surprising ways, welcomed me with open arms. There's something magical about how New Orleans doesn't just surprise you with its food and culture but with its ability to heal, to transform, and to connect. I found this magic not just in the big moments, but in the everyday ones—like a quietly shared queen cake from Levee Baking Co. or a savory Boudin Boy (essentially a laminated French pastry filled with egg and Cajun sausage) from Ayu Bakehouse, each bite telling its own story.

The journey begins on Frenchmen Street with **Ayu Bakehouse**, where owners Kelly Jacques and Samantha Weiss invite you into a warm, open kitchen space in the Marigny neighborhood. There's something almost magical about watching the bakers pull off perfection with each batch of coconut custard-filled kaya buns or muffuletta breadsticks laced with olives and salami while the soft morning light spills through the windows. Their homage to New Orleans flavors is as creative as it is delicious—imagine a reptile-shaped loaf of challah called the "challahgator" or a king cake braided babka. Each pastry is a nod to the owners' roots: Kelly's Southeast Asian heritage and Samantha's New York upbringing meet New Orleans classics in sweet and savory combinations that leave you with something you never expected yet can't quite forget.

Take a short drive down oak tree-lined avenues to Magazine Street and you'll discover **La Boulangerie**, a must-visit, where French tradition meets local flavor in an artful, effortless way. Executive pastry chef Maggie Scales creates

Ayu Bakehouse





Amber and her daughter at Hyams Fountain Gardens in Audubon Park

LUCKY CHARMS

In 1870, the French tradition of the *fève*—a little charm nestled inside each king cake—made its way to New Orleans. Originally, these charms were simply dried fava beans, but over time, they evolved into a delightful array of porcelain figures and eventually into plastic babies. Finding the fève brings the promise of good fortune and the playful responsibility of providing the next king cake!

Pecan-Orange Galette des Reines, PAGE 101

A FLAVORFUL TRADITION WITH A TWIST

The beloved king cake, traditionally made with cinnamon and sugar, is a symbol of the Carnival season, but today's bakers are putting their own spins on this iconic dessert. Here are a few local spots where you can find a king cake like no other.

The coveted *galette des reines* ("queens' cake") from **Levee Baking Co.** is a twist on the traditional French *galette des rois* ("kings' cake") comprised of puff pastry filled with frangipane, a rich almond cream. Levee's version is golden and irresistibly flaky, with a decadent filling made with local toasted pecans and candied Louisiana citrus.

Lagniappe Bakehouse brings a global twist to its king cake offerings, including a sourdough brioche version spiced with West African grains of paradise, filled with jam, and topped with frosting and colored sprinkles. Its Northern French-style version is an elegant puff pastry filled with spiced rosemary frangipane, complemented by candied Louisiana citrus, marmalade, and whiskey-soaked cherries—creating a sweet yet earthy experience perfect for the season.

Ayu Bakehouse gives a fresh spin to the king cake by beautifully braiding its version into a babka-style pastry, filled with a luscious cinnamon cream cheese, rich chocolate-hazelnut, or burnt honey cream with local candied citrus.

The Krewe Bagel at **Flour Moon Bagels** is a playful and savory take on the king cake tradition. This giant, seed-covered bagel is stuffed with cream cheese, lox, and all the fixings.

pastry masterpieces with layers that are as delicate as they are decadent. Its holy trinity of croissants—classic, chocolate, and almond—is a French mastery of laminated dough. Each bite is pure magic. The transition from pastries to savory dishes is seamless. Order the gumbo, rich and smoky with layers of flavor, paired with a freshly baked mini baguette, the kind with a crisp, golden crust that crackles when you break it open, and you've got yourself a meal that's unbelievably comforting.

Just a few minutes down Magazine Street is **Levee Baking Co.**, where Christina Balzebre's naturally leavened loaves and handmade pastries have won a fiercely loyal following. Her offerings—like the irresistible morning buns, a croissant cinnamon roll with a luscious vanilla bean cream cheese icing, or lemony whipped ricotta, Aleppo pepper oil, and fresh dill on a caramelized onion focaccia—perfectly capture the spirit of the city's evolving food scene.

Next up is **Lagniappe Bakehouse**, where pastry chef Kaitlin Guerin celebrates the intersection of African diaspora and Southern foodways with her elevated pastries. The newly opened Central City brick-and-mortar is a tribute to Kaitlin's love of storytelling through her baked goods, like her adored *pain au chocolat* filled with Tanzanian chocolate from local makers Piety and Desire Chocolate. Every pastry here tells a story, from the buttery lattice croissants filled with Vaucresson's local sausage to the vibrant, seasonal tarts and pies.

Just off the Lafitte Greenway in Mid-City, **Flour Moon Bagels** serves up a bold reimagining of the humble bagel. Owned by Breanne Kostyk and partner Jeff Hinson, this spot brings New York-style bagels to New Orleans with a twist, focusing on chewy, kettle-boiled bagels that have a crisp, golden crust and tender interior. With a menu filled with fan favorites like the Big Dipper—a Jerusalem bagel served with whipped labneh, olive oil, and za'atar for

Flour Moon Bagels

dipping—and Whitefish Salad, a delicate smear of local briny goodness, Flour Moon elevates bagels into serious treats that locals and visitors alike happily queue up for.

In the Leonidas neighborhood, you'll find **Bellegarde Bakery**, a New Orleans institution that began as a one-man operation under Graison Gill. Known for his intense, fiery commitment to old-world craft, Graison built Bellegarde around fresh-milled flour, gaining a devoted following among top New Orleans restaurants and artisan bread enthusiasts. The heart of Bellegarde's operation lies in its in-house stone mills, which produce fresh, organic flour—ground right in the bakery to ensure the highest quality. Whether you're picking up its famous loaves, a freshly baked sandwich baguette, or a sweet pastry, every bite connects you to the rich, artisanal history that defines this iconic New Orleans bakery.

In a city where flavors are never predictable and stories are told through food, New Orleans's bakeries are shifting the boundaries of what we expect from pastries. From Ayu Bakehouse's globally inspired yet deeply local creations to La Boulangerie's perfect croissants, these bakeries are as much about innovation as they are about tradition. Whether you're grabbing a morning bun from Lagniappe or enjoying a bagel from Flour Moon, you'll leave New Orleans not just full but also deeply inspired by the creativity and care that go into every bite.

In 2025, New Orleans bakeries—led by passionate, talented bakers and innovators—are offering a new narrative of resilience, creativity, and community, one pastry at a time. Their efforts prove that food, at its heart, is about connection—to place, to each other, and to the stories we share.

NEW ORLEANS: A FEW ESSENTIALS

WHERE TO DRINK

Bar Marilou
The Carousel Bar & Lounge
The Elysian Bar
Jewel of the South

WHERE TO EAT

Brennan's
Casamento's Restaurant
Cochon Butcher
Dakar NOLA
Mosquito Supper Club
N7
Parkway Bakery and Tavern
Pêche Seafood Grill
Saba
Stein's Market & Deli
Willie Mae's Scotch House

WHERE TO GET A TREAT

Ayu Bakehouse
Bellegarde Bakery
Cafe Beignet on Royal Street
Flour Moon Bagels
Hansen's Sno-Bliz
La Boulangerie
Lagniappe Bakehouse
Levee Baking Co.

WHERE TO TAKE A WALK

Audubon Park
Audubon Zoo
City Park
Lafayette Cemetery No. 1

WHERE TO SHOP

Faulkner House Books
Lucullus Antiques

WHERE TO STAY

The Chloe
Hotel Peter and Paul
Hotel Saint Vincent
Maison de la Luz

WHERE TO LISTEN TO MUSIC

Bacchanal Fine Wine & Spirits
Preservation Hall

CAFE' BEIGNET

Willie Mae's
Scotch House

Cochon
Butcher
BUTCHER

La Boulangerie

PECAN-ORANGE GALETTE DES REINES

Makes 1 (9-inch) galette

The galette des reines (queens' cake) is a reimagined take on a galette des rois, a traditional French pastry baked from January 6 to celebrate the feast of the Epiphany until Fat Tuesday. The galette des reines at Levee Baking Co. is particularly special. Instead of being filled with almond-based frangipane, Levee uses Louisiana pecans mixed with sugar, butter, eggs, and candied citrus. Inspired by Levee Baking Co., this galette des reines has a toasted pecan and orange zest filling nestled between layers of flaky puff pastry. Baked bien cuit—meaning "well done" and referring to its beautiful dark caramelized crust—and brushed with simple syrup for a glossy finish, it's truly a cake fit for a queen.

- 6 tablespoons (43 grams) pecan halves
- ½ teaspoon (2.5 grams) olive oil
- 3 tablespoons (36 grams) granulated sugar, divided
- 1 teaspoon (2 grams) orange zest
- 1 large egg (50 grams), room temperature
- 2 tablespoons (28 grams) unsalted butter, room temperature
- 1 teaspoon (6 grams) vanilla bean paste
- ½ teaspoon (1.5 grams) kosher salt
- Classic Puff Pastry Dough (recipe follows) or 1 (14-ounce) package (396.9 grams) frozen all-butter puff pastry, thawed according to package directions
- All-purpose flour, for dusting
- 1 tablespoon (15 grams) water, plus more for brushing
- 1 large egg yolk (19 grams)

1. In a small skillet, cook pecans and oil over medium-low heat, slowly stirring constantly, until the pecans smell toasted and are slightly darker in color, 2 to 5 minutes. Spread in a single layer on parchment paper or a plate, and let cool for 15 minutes.

2. In a small bowl, place 2 tablespoons (24 grams) sugar and orange zest. Using your fingertips, rub zest into sugar until fragrant and blended.

3. In the work bowl of a small food processor, pulse toasted pecans until very fine; scrape sides of bowl. Add sugar mixture, egg, butter, vanilla bean paste, and salt; pulse just until mixture is smooth, stopping to scrape sides of bowl. Transfer mixture to an airtight container, and refrigerate for at least 2 hours or up to 3 days.

4. Divide Classic Puff Pastry Dough in half. On a lightly floured surface, roll one portion of dough into a circle a little larger than 9 inches in diameter and about ⅛ inch thick, dusting with more flour as needed. Using a 9-inch round cake pan or plate as a guide, cut dough into a 9-inch circle. Repeat with remaining dough.

5. Line a rimmed baking sheet with parchment paper. Place 1 dough circle on prepared pan. Using a spoon or offset spatula, spread pecan mixture evenly onto dough, leaving a 1-inch border around edges. Lightly brush water onto edges of dough. Place remaining dough circle on top of pecan mixture, and press edges of dough together with your fingertips to seal well. Loosely cover with plastic wrap, and freeze for 30 minutes.

6. Preheat oven to 400°F (200°C).

7. In a small microwave-safe bowl, heat 1 tablespoon (15 grams) water and remaining 1 tablespoon (12 grams) sugar on high until sugar dissolves, about 30 seconds, stirring as needed.

8. In a small bowl, whisk egg yolk.

9. Brush a thin layer of egg yolk on top of dough, avoiding edges. (If egg yolk drips down the sides, the galette won't rise.) Using a paring knife, lightly score top of galette as desired, taking care not to cut all the way through dough.

10. Bake for 10 minutes. Reduce oven temperature to 375°F (190°C), rotate pan, and bake until puffed and golden brown, 35 to 40 minutes more. Brush syrup onto galette, and bake until deep golden brown and top is shiny, 2 to 3 minutes more. Let cool on pan a wire rack for at least 15 minutes. Cut into slices, and serve warm or at room temperature. Best served same day as made. Store in an airtight container for up to 3 days.

Classic Puff Pastry Dough

Makes 1 (9-inch) galette

- **4 cups (508 grams) bread flour**
- **1½ teaspoons (4.5 grams) kosher salt**
- **5 tablespoons (70 grams) cold unsalted butter, cubed**
- **1¼ cups (300 grams) ice water**
- **1 tablespoon (15 grams) fresh lemon juice**
- **1½ cups (340 grams) unsalted butter, softened**
- **⅓ cup (42 grams) all-purpose flour, plus more for dusting**

1. In the bowl of a stand mixer, whisk together bread flour and salt by hand. Add cold butter; using the paddle attachment, beat at low speed until butter has worked into flour and mixture resembles cornmeal.
2. In a liquid-measuring cup, combine 1¼ cups (300 grams) ice water and lemon juice. With mixer on low speed, slowly add lemon water to flour mixture, beating just until combined. Switch to the dough hook attachment, and beat at medium-low speed until dough is smooth and elastic, 4 to 5 minutes.
3. Lightly dust work surface with all-purpose flour; turn out dough onto prepared surface, and shape into a 1-inch-thick square. Wrap in plastic wrap, and refrigerate until ready to use or for at least 30 minutes.
4. Clean bowl of stand mixer and paddle attachment. Using the paddle attachment, beat softened butter and all-purpose flour at low speed until smooth and well combined, 2 to 3 minutes.
5. Draw a 9-inch square on a piece of parchment paper; turn parchment over. (Draw square dark enough to be seen through other side of parchment.) Spread butter mixture in an even layer within edges of square on prepared parchment. Fold parchment over butter, or top with another piece of parchment. Refrigerate until firm, at least 30 minutes.
6. Roll dough into a 12-inch square. Place cold butter square diagonally in center of dough so that four corners of dough are visible. Fold corners of dough over butter to meet in center, pinching seams to seal.
7. Lightly dust dough and a rolling pin with all-purpose flour. Using rolling pin, lightly tap dough into a rectangle. Roll dough into a 20x10-inch rectangle. Brush off excess flour. Fold dough in thirds like a letter. (This is called a trifold.) Rotate dough 90 degrees so one long side is now closest to you.
8. Roll dough into a 20x10-inch rectangle, with one long side closest to you. Fold dough in half so short sides meet; gently press dough at fold to mark center. Unfold dough. Fold short sides of dough to meet in center of dough; fold one half of dough onto other half of dough as if you are closing a book. (This is called a book-fold.) Wrap dough in plastic wrap, and refrigerate for 30 minutes.
9. Repeat rolling and folding procedure for 2 more book-folds, refrigerating dough for at least 30 minutes after each fold. (You should complete a total of 1 trifold and 3 book-folds.) Wrap dough in plastic wrap, and refrigerate for at least 1 hour or up to 2 days.

LEMONY VANILLA BEAN COOKIES

Makes about 20 cookies

Perfect for Mardi Gras morning, these cookies are lovely alongside a cup of chicory coffee topped with softly whipped cream to capture the spirit of the day. Refrigerating the cookie dough is one of those little secrets that can truly transform these cookies. When you give the dough a chance to rest, the flour hydrates and those lovely notes of lemon and vanilla mingle and deepen into something magical. Another benefit is that when you let the dough chill, your cookies hold their shape beautifully in the oven. And don't forget to sprinkle on the lemony-salty sugar just before baking them! The dough has a subtle sweetness, so this little finishing touch gives the cookie an irresistible crisp, citrusy-floral coating that perfectly complements the delicate buttery cookie.

Dough:

- ⅓ cup (67 grams) granulated sugar
- 1 tablespoon (3 grams) lemon zest
- 1 cup (227 grams) unsalted European-style butter, room temperature
- ⅓ cup (40 grams) confectioners' sugar, sifted
- 1½ tablespoons (27 grams) vanilla bean paste
- 1 teaspoon (3 grams) kosher salt
- 1 large egg yolk (19 grams), room temperature
- 2 cups plus 1½ tablespoons (272 grams) all-purpose flour

Topping:

- ¼ cup (50 grams) granulated sugar
- 1 tablespoon (3 grams) lemon zest
- ¼ teaspoon flaked sea salt

1. For dough: In the bowl of a stand mixer, place granulated sugar and lemon zest. Using your fingertips, rub zest into sugar until fragrant and blended. Add butter, confectioners' sugar, vanilla bean paste, and kosher salt. Using the paddle attachment, beat at low speed until smooth and creamy (you don't want it to get light and fluffy), stopping to scrape bottom and sides of bowl. Add egg yolk, and beat for 1 minute. Add flour, and beat just until no flour streaks remain. (Alternatively, beat in flour until a few flour streaks remain; gently stir with a flexible spatula just until no flour streaks remain.)

2. Turn out dough onto a large piece of parchment paper or plastic wrap. (Dough will be soft.) Fold parchment or plastic over dough to cover. Using your hands, shape dough into a log by pressing it and rolling it on work surface to help create a smooth shape. (If the dough is too soft, refrigerate for 30 minutes or so to firm up.) Shape dough into an 8-inch log (2 to 2¼ inches thick). Twist ends of parchment or plastic, and refrigerate overnight or for up to 1 week. (Allowing the dough to rest overnight will result in better flavor and texture of the cookies.)

3. Preheat oven to 325°F (170°C). Line a baking sheet with parchment paper.

4. For topping: In a small bowl, combine granulated sugar, lemon zest, and sea salt. Using your fingers, rub mixture together until sugar is tinted yellow and smells deeply of lemon.

5. Using a sharp knife, cut dough log into ¼-inch-thick rounds. Place 2 inches apart on prepared pan. (If you don't want to bake all the cookies, just slice and bake what you like, and refrigerate remaining dough.) Sprinkle topping onto dough rounds, gently pressing into dough.

6. Bake until edges are browned and bottoms are golden brown, 15 to 18 minutes, rotating pan halfway through baking. Let cool on pan for 2 minutes. Remove from pan, and let cool completely on a wire rack. Store in an airtight container for up to 3 days.

Want to bake with us in New Orleans? Email events@bakefromscratch.com and let us know if you're interested in a 2026 baking retreat in the Crescent City.

Peeling back the layers of this eye-catching cake

Baumkuchen

BY CHRISTINA FLEISCH
PHOTOGRAPHY BY KYLE CARPENTER / RECIPE DEVELOPMENT BY AMANDA STABILE
FOOD STYLING BY AARON CONRAD / STYLING BY MAGGIE RATLIFF

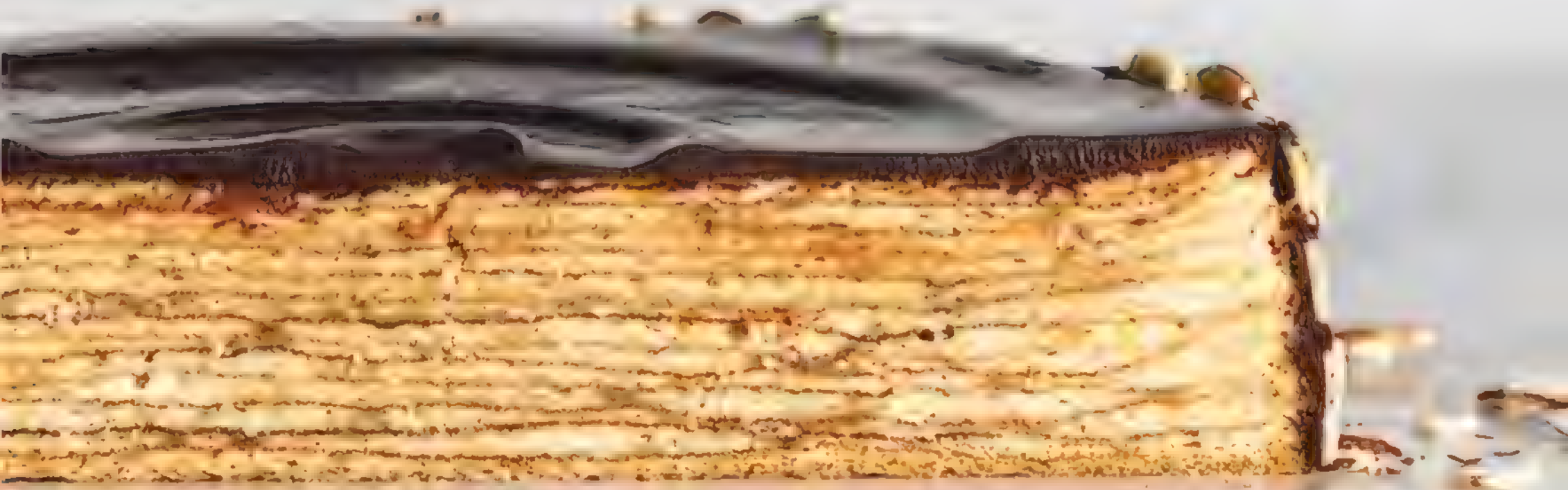
With its distinctive ringed and ridged appearance and centuries-old history, Baumkuchen has become a beloved treat the world over. The German word "baumkuchen" translates to "tree cake," which refers to a cylindrical cake that bakes in layers on a spit—a large pole or stick that is slowly turned over a fire—and, when sliced, resembles the rings of a tree. Cakes similar to *baumkuchen* began appearing in the Holy Roman Empire (portions of modern-day France, Germany, Italy, and other Western and Central European countries) in the Middle Ages. Historians approximate baumkuchen to be at least 600 years old, with the oldest German-language recipe first appearing in print around 1450.

Baumkuchen originally started as a dough that is thinly patted onto the spit. After the first layer is cooked and the exterior has browned, another layer of dough is added and cooked. The layering and cooking process is repeated until the desired size is reached, typically 18 to 20 layers. Once it's removed from the spit, the hollow cake is sliced crosswise to reveal its tree ring-like layers. The process to make the cake was long and involved, so it was largely reserved for holidays and special occasions among the wealthy; baumkuchen was a popular cake at weddings of the nobility in Nuremberg and Frankfurt, Germany. Individual servings were sometimes flavored with spices such as nutmeg or spirits like rum, but as ingredients spread and became more widely available, the dough itself was flavored.

Sometime during the 1500s, the process to make the cake changed. Rather than adding many thin layers of dough onto the spit, a thick dough was tied to it in intervals with string, which created ridges on the outside of the cake as it baked. And as chocolate became known to royalty and the elite in the 1600s, baumkuchen began being coated in chocolate before removal from the spit. The process continued to evolve and became the version that's most familiar today: Rather than dough, layer upon layer of a thin batter is poured onto a constantly rotating cooking cylinder, and some bakeries use a wooden or metal comb to gently score the layers to re-create the exterior ridges from strings. Baumkuchen is still glazed with chocolate, though many bakers add their own flair with nuts and other decoration.

Even though baumkuchen's popularity grew and it became more affordable to make, for most of its history, it was still largely made in private settings for parties. Around the early 1800s, bakeries in Dresden, Cottbus, and Salzwedel, Germany, created mail-order services for baumkuchen; the bakeries in Salzwedel became the most well-known for the cakes and are still in existence today. And love for baumkuchen has traveled all over the globe, with versions appearing in Japan and Hawaii. A baker named Karl Juchheim living in China was taken as a prisoner of war in Hiroshima, Japan, during World War I. After his release, he relocated to Japan and opened a bakery in Kobe, where he began to sell baumkuchen. The cake became a household favorite among the locals and eventually across the rest of Japan. In 1880, "Merrie Monarch" King Kalākaua of Hawaii visited Berlin, Germany, where he encountered baumkuchen. He loved the cake and brought the recipe back to Hawaii. Although the cake didn't sweep across all the nation's islands, today, the Baumkuchen Farm in Papaikou, Hawaii, sells its cakes with a tropical flair, infused with macadamia nuts, pineapple, mango, and Hawaiian coffee. And they sell full-size baumkuchen, known as "stems," as wedding cakes.

Thankfully for everyone, you don't have to let the fact that you don't have a spit stand in your way to make baumkuchen. Our recipe was created for home bakers to achieve the same flavors and distinct layers as the original, and this version is just as worthy of serving at special celebrations.



BAUMKUCHEN

Makes 1 (9-inch) cake

This home-friendly version is made by spreading thin layers of a spice- and spirit-infused batter into a pan and baking them one by one, with each layer becoming lightly toasted. A generous brush of preserves adds moisture and a hint of fruity flavor. Topped with a luscious ganache and crunchy almonds, this rich cake is a heavenly combination of flavors and textures.

Cake:

- **6 large eggs (300 grams), separated and room temperature**
- **1¼ cups (250 grams) granulated sugar, divided**
- **¼ teaspoon kosher salt**
- **5 ounces (142 grams) marzipan (see Note), chopped**
- **1 cup (227 grams) unsalted butter, softened**
- **3 tablespoons (45 grams) rum or almond liqueur**
- **1 teaspoon (4 grams) vanilla extract**
- **½ teaspoon (2 grams) almond extract (optional)**
- **1¼ cups (156 grams) cornstarch**
- **¾ cup (94 grams) all-purpose flour**
- **2 teaspoons (10 grams) baking powder**
- **¼ teaspoon ground cinnamon**
- **¼ teaspoon ground nutmeg**

Topping:

- **3 tablespoons (60 grams) apricot preserves**
- **½ cup (120 grams) heavy whipping cream, room temperature**
- **5 ounces (142 grams) semisweet chocolate, chopped**
- **2 tablespoons (28 grams) unsalted butter, softened**
- **1½ cups (150 grams) toasted sliced almonds**

1. Position oven rack in center of oven. Preheat oven to broil (or high broil). Spray sides of a 9-inch springform pan with baking spray with flour. Line bottom of pan with parchment paper.

2. For cake: In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the whisk attachment, beat egg whites at medium-high speed until foamy, about 1 minute. With mixer on medium speed, gradually add ½ cup (100 grams) sugar and salt. Increase mixer speed to medium-high speed, and beat until stiff peaks form, 1 to 2 minutes. Transfer egg white mixture to a large bowl. Clean bowl, and return to mixer.

3. In a small microwave-safe bowl, heat marzipan on high until softened, 15 to 30 seconds.

4. In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, beat softened marzipan, butter, and remaining ¾ cup (150 grams) sugar at medium speed until light and creamy, 2 to 3 minutes, stopping to scrape bottom and sides of bowl. With mixer on medium-high speed, add egg yolks, one at a time, beating until combined after each addition and stopping to scrape sides of bowl. Beat in rum or liqueur and vanilla. Beat in almond extract (if using).

5. In a medium bowl, sift together cornstarch, flour, baking powder, cinnamon, and nutmeg. Using a rubber spatula, fold half of cornstarch mixture into marzipan mixture. Fold in half of egg white mixture. Repeat with remaining cornstarch mixture and remaining egg white mixture. Spread ½ cup (95 grams) batter into bottom of prepared pan.

6. Broil until golden brown on surface, about 2 minutes. (Do not walk away; this happens fast!) Immediately spread another layer of batter on top of first, and broil until golden brown on surface, about 2 minutes. Repeat procedure with remaining batter. (The first few layers may take longer to cook, but the more layers added, the closer to the heat source and the faster they cook.) Let cool in pan for 10 minutes. Gently run a knife between sides of pan and cake; remove sides of pan. Let cake cool completely on pan on a wire rack.

7. For topping: In a small microwave-safe bowl, heat preserves on high in 15-second intervals, stirring between each, until fluid. Using a pastry brush, brush a thin layer of preserves on top and sides of cooled cake. Let stand until preserves are set and just tacky, about 30 minutes.

8. In a small saucepan, heat cream over medium-low heat just until beginning to steam. (Do not boil.)

9. In a medium heatproof bowl, combine hot cream, chocolate, and butter; let stand for 5 minutes. Stir until chocolate and butter are melted and mixture is smooth. Pour onto cake, using an offset spatula to smooth top and spread on sides. Let stand for 5 minutes. Press almonds onto side of cake. Let stand until ganache is completely set, about 20 minutes at room temperature or 10 to 15 minutes in refrigerator, before serving. Refrigerate in an airtight container for up to 3 days.

Note: *Be sure you are using marzipan and not almond paste; the two products are not interchangeable. Marzipan is readily available in large grocery stores, or you can make it yourself with our recipe for Marzipan at* bakefromscratch.com.

SPRINGTIME DELIGHT

These muffins are quick to come together and filled with fruity flavor

STRAWBERRY–RICOTTA MUFFINS

Makes 12 muffins

Topped with a crunchy streusel, these muffins aren't just a great on-the-go breakfast; they're an indulgent snack, a fruity dessert, or a simply elegant brunch bread. A combination of melted butter and oil create a moist crumb, creamy ricotta cheese adds richness, and sweet strawberries provide a burst of fresh flavor to every bite.

Batter:

- 3 cups (376 grams) all-purpose flour, divided
- 2 teaspoons (10 grams) baking powder
- 1½ teaspoons (4.5 grams) kosher salt
- ½ teaspoon (2.5 grams) baking soda
- 1 cup (200 grams) granulated sugar
- 1 cup (225 grams) whole-milk ricotta cheese*
- ¼ cup (57 grams) unsalted butter, melted
- ¼ cup (56 grams) neutral oil
- 3 large eggs (150 grams), room temperature
- 2 teaspoons (8 grams) vanilla extract
- 1¾ cups (301 grams) chopped fresh strawberries, patted dry

Topping:

- 2 cups (250 grams) all-purpose flour
- 6 tablespoons (72 grams) granulated sugar
- 6 tablespoons (84 grams) firmly packed light brown sugar
- 1½ teaspoons (4.5 grams) kosher salt
- ¾ cup (170 grams) unsalted butter, melted
- 1½ teaspoons (6 grams) vanilla extract
- ¼ cup (44 grams) chopped fresh strawberries
- 2 tablespoons (24 grams) turbinado sugar

Strawberry preserves*, to serve

1. For batter: In a large bowl, whisk together 2¾ cups plus 2 tablespoons (360 grams) flour, baking powder, salt, and baking soda.
2. In a medium bowl, whisk together granulated sugar, ricotta, melted butter, oil, eggs, and vanilla until well combined. Add sugar mixture to flour mixture, folding just until dry ingredients are moistened.
3. In another medium bowl, toss together strawberries and remaining 2 tablespoons (16 grams) flour; stir into batter just until combined. (Batter will be lumpy; do not overmix.) Cover and refrigerate for 30 to 45 minutes.
4. For topping: In another medium bowl, whisk together flour, granulated sugar, brown sugar, and salt until well combined. Stir in melted butter and vanilla until mixture is well combined and crumbly. Cover and refrigerate.
5. Preheat oven to 400°F (200°C). Line every other cup of 2 (12-cup) muffin pans with tulip-style paper liners. Fill empty cups halfway with water.
6. Divide batter among prepared muffin cups (about ½ cup or 115 grams each).
7. Bake for 5 minutes. Reduce oven temperature to 375°F (190°C), and bake for 5 minutes more. Working quickly, sprinkle ¼ cup (36 grams) lightly packed topping onto each muffin. Sprinkle strawberries and turbinado sugar on top. Bake until a wooden pick inserted in center comes out clean, 13 to 15 minutes more. Let cool in pans on wire racks for 15 minutes. Serve warm with preserves. Store in an airtight container for up to 3 days.

**We used BelGioioso® Ricotta con Latte® Cheese and Bonne Maman® Strawberry Preserves.*

PRO TIPS: *Refrigerating the batter allows the flour to fully hydrate, which leads to a higher rise during baking. Batter can also be refrigerated overnight for a make-ahead option. Tulip-style liners allow the muffins to bake up tall with a nice dome and straight sides.*

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European-style butter
Full-fat dairy products
Diamond Crystal kosher salt
Conventional-bake ovens
Digital thermometers and scales
KitchenAid Artisan stand mixers
Williams Sonoma Goldtouch bakeware

Although both weight and volume measurements are included, readers are strongly encouraged to measure by weight

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credits

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Page 79—Pacifica Footed Stand in Artichoke by Casafina, *casafinagifts.com*
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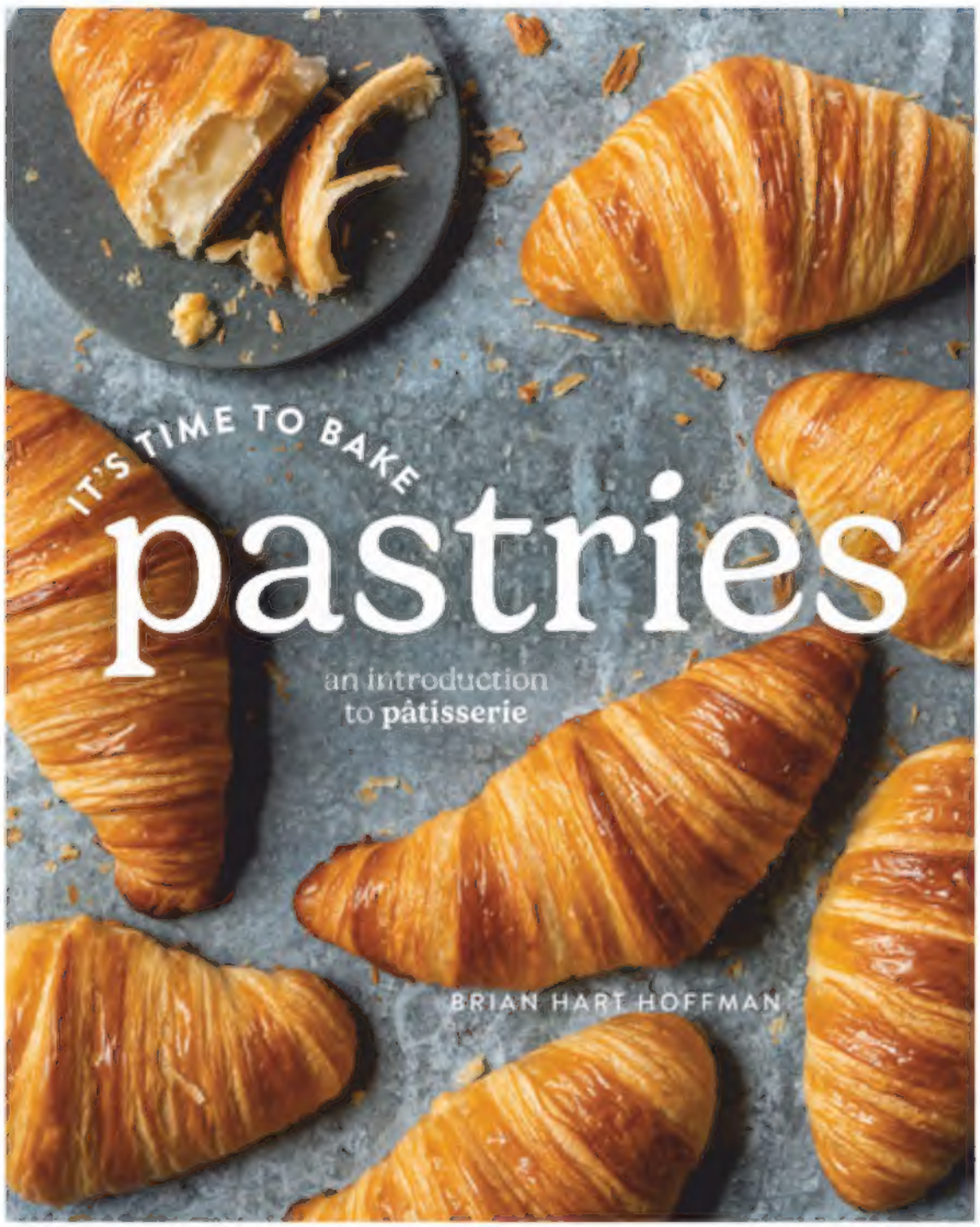

This book delves into the fundamental types of French pastry dough, each possessing distinctive characteristics and versatile applications, that serve as the basis for an array of irresistible treats. Featuring more than 60 foundational recipes, step-by-step instructions, helpful tips and tricks, and full-color photography throughout, this book will give you the knowledge and confidence to master the essentials of pastry to create pâtisserie-style bakes at home.

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Essential Cake-Baking Equipment

Find Rose on Instagram at @realbakingwithrose and at *realbakingwithrose.com*.

There is a lot of quality equipment that makes baking easier and more fun, but I'm listing here the equipment I find the most indispensable. The oven is getting the most attention because it is the common denominator of success in cake-baking.

BY ROSE LEVY BERANBAUM

OVENS: No two ovens bake exactly the same. All ovens, except for those with circulating trays, will have some hot spots. Convection ovens tend to bake more evenly but still have hot spots. I rotate my cakes halfway around after two-thirds of the estimated baking time—except if they are sponge-type cakes such as génoise or chiffon, which will fall if moved before they finish baking. When you get a new oven, try baking a familiar cake to see how it turns out. I use my All-Occasion Downy Yellow Cake from *The Cake Bible*. Get to know your oven and you can adjust accordingly.

I find the Square Dot (a dual oven and probe thermometer) by ThermoWorks invaluable to test the range of fluctuation and, if necessary, lower or raise the temperature. From my experience, gas ovens fluctuate less than electric, but I find both work well for cake-baking.

Don't be afraid to try things out. Although most cake recipes conventionally say to bake in the center of the oven, I recently realized a mind-blowing fact and wonder why it took me so long to think of it: My Gaggenau, which is considered to be the Rolls Royce of ovens, has a hot spot in the center front. So, I tried baking a cake off-center and it baked totally even in color!

INSTANT-READ THERMOMETER: Many years ago, I designed and marketed mercury thermometers, which were the only ones accurate to a fraction of a degree. But then mercury became illegal to use in the kitchen. I couldn't imagine anything taking its place until ThermoWorks came up with a thermometer that was even more accurate, and the latest model, Thermapen ONE, reads in under a second—far speedier than my mercury thermometers in their wildest dreams! I cannot contemplate baking without it. Everything has a temperature, and I want to know exactly what it is, especially syrups and cakes!

INFRARED THERMOMETER: ThermoWorks also produces an infrared thermometer, which I use to test various locations where temperature is critical for ingredients such as butter.

SCALES: *The Cake Bible* was the first cookbook to offer weight measures, and it has taken more than three decades for baking authors to embrace the sheer superiority and ease of weighing over measuring by volume. The scales I find to be the most reliably accurate are the Escali Alimento, the My Weigh, and the OXO.

STAND MIXER: Yes, you can use an electric hand mixer at slightly higher speeds than indicated, but if you do a lot of cake-baking, you will want to have a stand mixer. The KitchenAid Artisan 5-quart tilt-head mixer works for almost all cakes except wedding cakes that would have to be baked in batches.

LAYER CAKE PANS: My favorites are USA Pan 9-inch-round, 2-inch-high pans made of aluminized steel. They bake evenly and unmold easily.

BUNDT PANS: Nordic Ware cast aluminum are the gold standard. The 10-cup pans come in many designs, but I recommend choosing ones with simpler shapes, which are easier to unmold. If I had just one pan, it would be the Anniversary Bundt Pan, which works equally well for 10- and 15-cup cakes.

OTHER PANS: Tube pans for chiffon and angel food cakes, springform pans for cheesecake, heavy-gauge sheet pans for cake rolls, and muffin pans for cupcakes.

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